

ABOVE THE NOISE OF THE CROWD



*Thirty years behind
the Alabama microphone*

**JOHN
FORNEY**



ABOVE THE NOISE OF THE CROWD

Here it is. John Forney's remembrances of 30 years of broadcasting Alabama football games including those when Paul Bryant led the Crimson Tide to previously undreamed of heights. Forney recalls all and tells much in a no-holds-barred, "warts and all" narrative that one moment elicits tears and the next gales of laughter.

Forney followed Alabama's football fortunes from the lowest ebb in 1957 to national championship heights from such wide-ranging sights as the Meadowlands of Jersey and Miami's Orange Bowl to Seattle's Washington Husky Stadium and the fabled Los Angeles Coliseum. The games are here but so are the hitherto untold tales of trips, short and long, and insightful comments about well-known people on the college football scene.

Forney has written the book following a football broadcast cue sheet format – pregame comments, play-by-play action, half time and first and third quarter breaks plus "time-out" which gives the reader intimate insights about Coach Bryant and the Crimson Tide.

This book is filled with memory-triggers that will help fans recall a favorite game or player with a special clarity.

In Paul Bryant's 25 years at the helm of Alabama Football the Crimson Tide won 232 lost 46 and tied 9. Through all this color and excitement John Forney was known as "the Voice of the Tide." You listened to him then. Now read his own unique memoirs of those golden gridiron years.

**ABOVE THE NOISE
OF THE CROWD**

by John Forney



This book is dedicated to the memory of

THE MAN

and

THE CRIMSON TIDE

Past. Present. Future.

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PRE-GAME COMMENTS — DECEMBER, 1982

The numbing cold of the Liberty Bowl's seemingly interminable 24th game had just about worn off, thanks to the car's heater going at full blast and a dollop or two of Chivas Regal. Paul Bryant had coached his last game and his players had made it a victory, 21-15, over Illinois. I had come to Memphis not in any official capacity because the Mutual Network was handling the radio broadcast, but because I had been there in the beginning and wanted to be there at the end of the Bryant era.

However, that day in the press room one of the official Alabama party mentioned that he needed someone to drive an old Aggie friend of Paul Bryant's to and from the stadium that night. I was happy to volunteer to help out, and the old friend turned out to be Johnny Mitchell, a warm and rollicking oil man from Houston. He was not a complete stranger to me because years before, in 1959 when Alabama played the University of Houston, I had attended a big party at Johnny's sumptuous home. It was my first exposure to lavish Texas-style entertaining, and you don't forget that. As one of the Alabama "tag-alongs" I'm not sure I ever actually met Johnny that night, because it was a BIG party.

At any rate, my volunteering netted me a good press parking pass and a most pleasant evening with Johnny and his son-in-law, Vernon Hallbeck. I told Vernon that somehow his name rang a bell with me, and he said he played and coached for awhile at TCU. He still has the trim, lithe physique of an athlete. It turned out he had played on the great Jim Swink teams of the mid-fifties, two of which had plastered Alabama good in the pre-Bryant days.

By pre-arrangement I met them in Johnny's suite at the Rivermont, where the Alabama team was staying. We had a bracing drink before bundling up and heading out for the wintry reaches of the Liberty Bowl Stadium. Between the passing of both teams, especially Illinois, and the long, sound-fouled halftime

show, it was eleven o'clock before the game ended. The game lasted over three hours, and in that numbing cold seemed an eternity; some women were afraid their dresses had gone out of style between kickoff and happy conclusion.

As I made my way down through the stands, I watched Coach Bryant. He was being herded by the television people for a final moment of history. I bumped into Larry Lacewell, also making his way towards the exit. Larry is the head football coach at Arkansas State University. He had once served as an assistant on Coach Bryant's Alabama staff and as defensive coordinator for Oklahoma on some of their greatest teams.

Larry is a bright, humorous fellow who, as Bryant had, hails from Fordyce, Arkansas, and who also had played for the Fordyce Redbugs. (In fact, Larry once told me that his mother was the first young lady Paul Bryant ever had a date with.) "I'm the second best coach from Fordyce," was one of his banquet speech lines.

That Larry felt an extreme closeness to Coach Bryant is an understatement. Standing there in the icy December wind, tears were streaming down Lacewell's face. "I'm sorry about doing this, John," he stammered. "If the old so-and-so had quit last year when he should have, it wouldn't have bothered me. But, tonight. . . ." He shook his head. I knew what he meant and was afraid to try to reply, so I just squeezed his shoulder and kept going.

Johnny, Vernon and I finally made our way to the car and stopped by the nearby Memphis Country Club for a post-game "thawer." Johnny didn't wait long before saying, "You know, Paul wants us to come by and see him. You think the traffic has cleared out?" I wasn't at all certain that Paul wanted us to come by, but Johnny is a positive person and there was no doubt in his mind. I have a feeling that Johnny usually goes to whomever he wants to . . . Reagan, Mrs. Thatcher, it wouldn't matter. So not much later we were driving in the cold darkness along the Mississippi up the hill to the Rivermont. We had just entered the lobby when we heard the sirens and saw the blue lights of the police escort bringing the victorious Alabama team back to the hotel. As we hurried into the jam-packed lobby area, the absolute unbounded joy on the faces of those youngsters was alone worth the trip. The pressures and anxieties they must have felt to win Paul Bryant's final game and having a role in sports history must have been incalculable. But it

had been done, and now their relief and jubilation was manifest as only it can be in superbly conditioned 20-year-olds. Jesse Bendross rode up in the elevator with us; and his smile would have lit up a room.

Paul Bryant Jr. met us at the door of coach's suite. I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that Johnny was one of the closest and dearest friends of the entire Bryant family. A Texas A&M grad and major influence, Johnny was one of the minority of Aggie insiders who understood Bryant's decision to leave Texas A&M to return to Alabama. Their friendship transcended any such feelings. Some of his children had been in Mae Martin Bryant's wedding, and the firm ties both men shared had not diminished in the intervening years. All of which is to say we were made most welcome. The only people in the suite were the coach, young Paul, and the wondrous black aide-de-camp, Billy Varner, a University of Alabama policeman whose sole "beat" was Paul Bryant.

Coach Bryant sat in the middle of the main room sipping a Coca-Cola. He was erect, handsome, room-dominating (as always), but he was ghost-pale and weary, absolutely drained. I had had reservations about intruding, but began to feel comfortable as he warmed to the conversation. "Was it a good game for TV? For the spectators?" We assured him that it was, almost too good.

"You had to win that one, Paul," Johnny said.

"Oh, I wanted to win it, sure," he said in that low voice, "but mainly I didn't want those kids to have to live with the loss the rest of their lives."

Standing there and looking at the necklace of lights over one of the bridges across the Mississippi, I couldn't help but contrast in my mind this intimate, hushed affair with post-game get-togethers of seasons past—a crowded suite at the Bankhead Hotel in Birmingham with friends, business associates and bowl representatives jamming the room; a private room at Indian Hills Country Club in Tuscaloosa, active 'til all hours with Don Hutson, Riley Smith, Bob Ed Morrow and other old teammates celebrating one of the Tide's homecoming victories; and, almost twenty years before, a champagne and Beautiful People-laden yacht cruising Biscayne Bay in the moonlight after an Orange Bowl victory. Now there was just a handful of us. And although Johnny Mitchell kept up bright chatter, there was nevertheless a lugubrious quality to the

gathering, an air of inescapable finality in the room.

At one point we started to make our exit, but Coach Bryant held us. "Y'all don't have to go. Get another drink," he said. We stayed another half hour or so, leaving as Sports Information Director Jack Perry came in bringing the coach a complete set of the statistics from that final contest. Coach glanced at them, not really interested. His last game was behind him, and his age showed. It showed in the slump of his shoulders, the downward cast of his jaw. King Canute could not stem the tides, nor could Paul Bryant stem time, though we all wished he could.

As I went back into the frosty Delta night, I could not escape sadness and a certain sympathy for the sense of loneliness and despondency I felt for the big man back in the suite at the Rivermont. But the Bryant era had to end sometime. It couldn't go on and on. And, after all, it was the man's stock in trade to preach toughness, character, class, acceptance of challenge. He had taught this directly to hundreds of young men and indirectly to thousands of others. In his own act of retirement he enunciated those lessons he had lived as well as taught; but that didn't lessen the pain.

Because I remembered clearly being in Mobile and watching him bring his first Alabama team onto the field, I had that night in Memphis watched carefully as he made his way to the awards stand, wanting to recall the final exit as vividly as I did the initial entrance.

Between the anticipation and rumors and finally the reality of his return to Alabama in 1958, the Bryant era had spanned more than a quarter of a century. What follows are the recollections, private and public, of a person privileged to walk along somewhat closely on that magic, never-to-be-forgotten journey.

KICKOFF

Some may wonder how I got to the Bama Network booth. (Others may wonder how or why I stayed there for thirty years, but for now I'll address only the ascension.)

I was a 15-year-old senior at Tuscaloosa High School in 1943 (I had skipped an early grammar school grade and, at the time, Tuscaloosa had only three years of high school). Jimmy Doss, an interesting character if ever there was one, owned the town's only radio station, WJRD. Because The University was there WJRD had a very high quality announcing staff before the World War II draft began plucking them off. Doss called the high school one day and said, in effect, "Send me someone who won't get drafted for at least a year." Three of us who were active in speech and dramatics went to audition. To my amazement and delight, I got the job. By the time I was 16 I was doing four hours a day on the air, making \$17.50 per week, and owned an A Model Ford coupe.

I did news, disc shows, interviews, special events, sports. . . the whole works. It was a wonderful experience for a boy. Reading the AP and INS dispatches each day gave me an insight into World War II that I treasure.

I entered The University in pre-med, but when I went into the service in 1945, just as the war was ending, I figured (quite correctly, I remain convinced) I would be a lousy doctor. Upon my return to The University I decided to study English and journalism. Bert Bank, who had spent much of the war in infamous Japanese prisoner of war camps following the Bataan Death March, had opened Tuscaloosa's second radio station, WTBC. I joined on to do a daily sports show and sort of fell into doing basketball play-by-play when Bert's first choice for the job decided he couldn't do it. I believe I was the first person in the state of Alabama to broadcast basketball games.

FM radio was brand new and WAPI in Birmingham picked up

the Alabama basketball feed on its FM band. Maury Farrell was WAPI's longtime and well known sports director. In 1948 Maury was signed to call New York Giants baseball games with Frankie Frisch. He left Birmingham just about the time I got my degree in the March quarter.

Thad Holt, WAPI's manager and, with Ed Norton, part owner, had heard my basketball broadcasts. He inquired about me and I hustled to Birmingham for an interview. I got the job and the opportunity to work seven days a week for six to twelve hours per day. Lionel Baxter was boss and a hard-driving personality. He pushed himself and his employees without respite, a situation that resulted in me learning an awful lot about the radio business in an awfully short time. I called Birmingham Barons baseball games that summer. Winning the Dixie Series—a big deal in minor league baseball—made it quite a kick.

However, Maury and Nan Farrell had decided they had had enough of life in New York and returned to Birmingham. Mr. Holt and Lionel went out of their way to tell me how much a part of the station family I had become and I stayed on. That fall Maury and I alternated doing Alabama and Auburn games on AM and FM. (I know it will come as a shock to some of my Auburn friends to know the despised voice of Alabama was the 1948 co-voice of the Tigers.)

Nevertheless, when Maury returned I was destined to be second banana at WAPI. We are very good friends and there were never any hard feelings on my part regarding this situation. I really considered myself a writer first and a broadcaster second, so I decided to make my way in a new field—television writing and directing. After all, I had several years of solid experience, a college degree, and I was 21 years old. It was time to make New York my oyster!

I pounded the cold, gray pavements of Manhattan for six weeks and finally was offered two jobs—one at a large advertising agency (Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn) for \$35 per week in the newly-formed television department; the other at CBS in the mail room for \$32 per week. I was no fool; I took the higher-paying job. Thus, I more or less backed into the ad agency business, where I have been ever since.

Even in the agency business in New York, sports remained a big



In the good ol' days . . . with Jack Dempsey.

A young sportscaster in Tuscaloosa had unlikely opportunities to meet with the most glamorous names in sports, including heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey.

John Forney casts his first vote this fall
but he's already an established sports man.



WAPI'S YOUNG *SPORTCASTER*

When Maury Farrell went to New York to do Giants baseball games, it opened up a spot for me in Birmingham's market at WAPI.



My experience with "The Boys of Summer," the 1950 Brooklyn Dodgers baseball team, was in great part spent under the stadium, producing commercials for the broadcasts.

part of my life. I spent the summer of 1950 in the bowels of Ebbets Field working on the Brooklyn Dodger telecasts, producing and performing in live commercials. In 1952 I was commercial producer on Joe DiMaggio's local television show before and after each Yankees game. (In between I had worked on the old TV Hit Parade program, which was great fun.) Late in 1952 I decided to return to Alabama, accepting an offer from a Birmingham ad agency.

In the summer of 1953 I got a telephone call from my old boss, Lionel Baxter. "John," he said in those resonant stentorian tones, "Bert Bank and I have gotten exclusive rights to the Alabama football broadcasts. Maury's going to do the play-by-play. Would you like to do the color?"

From Lionel's standpoint, he was saved problems by me not being affiliated with any radio station; and more than that, he and Bert knew I would work cheap! From my standpoint, I was even broker than usual; and more than that, the opportunity to be involved in Alabama football broadcasts would be a most passionate labor of love.

I still remember vividly the telephone call and it can't be. . .just simply can't be over thirty years ago.

But it is. And that's how it began.

The opener that first year was at Crampton Bowl in Montgomery and the opposition was Mississippi Southern (now Southern Mississippi). Red Drew was Alabama's head coach and his Tide team was picked in some quarters to be best in the nation. However, a couple of Golden Eagle backs—Laurin Pepper and Bucky McElroy—had some different notions and the Southerners upset us, 25-19. The next week a heralded young sophomore quarterback, Bart Starr, came to the fore and helped us tie LSU, 7-7, in Mobile. Bama went on to win the Southeastern Conference championship in that first season, but the most memorable games were losses—notably to Maryland's national champions, 21-0 in College Park, and to Rice in the Cotton Bowl, the famous Tommy Lewis from-the-bench tackle of Dicky Moegle game.

There followed four years of Bama taking it on the chin almost every week. It was tough to be on the air describing that action. In fact, the mind is a wonderful thing in that it enables one to forget much unpleasantness, and I have conveniently forgotten most of the occurrences of those seasons. Therefore, I will spare you the details of them.

My thirty year involvement with the Alabama broadcasts began with a telephone call from Lionel Baxter. It ended with a phone call from my old and dear friend, Bert Bank. When it came I was not totally surprised. There had been numerous hints and rumors that changes in the broadcast were coming. I had resigned myself to no longer doing Alabama play-by-play but hoped to remain a part of the team as I had begun, doing color commentary.

Bert's call told me Coach Perkins would be hiring Paul Kennedy as a fulltime member of the athletics department; and, as a part of his duties, he would be the play-by-play man on both football and basketball broadcasts. I was off the crew.

I told Bert that I was disappointed, but that I appreciated all he and others had done in my behalf. I am a grown man and I know enough about life's vicissitudes to go with the flow; but if I said that it didn't hurt, this would book would be a novel.

I felt then and now that Ray Perkins was Alabama's best choice to keep the candle of Crimson Tide tradition burning brightly, wrote him to that effect, and wished him well. When the story broke publicly a few days later—before any formal announcement from The University—I know it caused embarrassment. The hulloaloo all this precipitated certainly surprised—and embarrassed—me (but I have to admit that the letters and calls I received

Alabama Broadcasters Association Birmingham, Alabama

This is to certify that

John Forney

is hereby awarded this

Certificate of Appreciation

for outstanding service and contributions to

Alabama Football Broadcasting
For 30 Great Years

on this 6th. day of January 1984

Ben H. McKinnon
Executive Director

Karl M. Richards
President

were warm and gratifying). Some—including national media—used the situation to vilify Perkins. The following letter, published in *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED*, October, 1983, states how I felt—and how I feel—as clearly as anything I could say now.

Sir:

My brother called long-distance to tell me that if he ever got fired he would wish for the same publicity I've had—ABC Television and SI (*The Dawning Of A New Day*, Sept. 19) in the same week, but still no resulting job offers.

John Underwood's article on Ray Perkins, Paul (Bear) Bryant's successor at Alabama, was first class, as Underwood's stories usually are. I believe the first two weeks of the season clearly proved Perkins a worthy successor to The Man, and that 'Bama fans will not have to suffer any painful interregnum.

I grew up in Tuscaloosa—one of my early memories is watching a touchdown pass from Dixie Howell to Don Hutson—so my 30-year association with the Alabama broadcasts was a special treasure for me. However, as I told Ray, I agreed with many changes he made and objected, obviously, to a few. But he has the responsibility for the athletic program, and I firmly believe he has to do what he thinks best for every aspect of it.

John Forney
Former Play-by-Play Announcer
Alabama Football Network
Birmingham

Twenty-five of those thirty years above the noise of the crowd, behind the Alabama microphone, chronicled the triumphs (and occasional tragedies) of Paul Bryant's Crimson Tide. Here are recollections of those years.

PLAY BY PLAY ACTION: THE FIRST YEAR

Few events have excited the state of Alabama as did the rumored return of Paul Bryant to be head football coach at The University late in the 1957 season. Certainly Alabama grads and Crimson Tide fans were excited, but it went beyond that. The entire state seemed to be caught up in it; Bryant already had the reputation of a pigskin messiah. Rumors abounded; people who knew Mary Harmon or her mother, who lived in Birmingham, reported the Bryants were looking for property in Tuscaloosa; or had called about renting a house; or some other telltale story which always precludes a change in a university's football coach; and which more often precludes nothing.

I was among those whose hopes and prayers that Paul Bryant would make his return to Alabama were answered.

There were several instances when Bryant's predecessor, J.B. "Ears" Whitworth, met obvious hostility when addressing the Alabama faithful. You couldn't help but feel sorry for the poor guy. Nevertheless, his Alabama teams had a three-year record of 4-24-2, absolutely unacceptable to Bama people. He made a very public and strong statement that he had not been invited to return for the 1958 season, then discussed it no more.

During year one before Bryant, Alabama made a valiant effort in its homecoming game against Mississippi State, but finally fell 25-13. In early November the Tide played what was probably its best game under Whitworth against Georgia Tech at Birmingham's Legion Field. I had begun betting fairly heavily—which is to say more than I could easily afford to lose—on football games, but can still proudly say that I almost never bet against Alabama. However, the hopelessness of that season was such that I took Georgia Tech on a teaser and, as I remember, had Tech minus 1. That meant if



Hear the 'BAMA GAMES ON RADIO

If you can't attend the Alabama games in person, be sure to listen to them over the University of Alabama Football Network station in your home town. All 1956 games of the Crimson Tide are broadcast exclusively over the University of Alabama Football Network . . . brought to you by your local Texaco dealer—the best friend your car has ever had!

Your Sportscasters



Leland Childs



John Forney

The University of Alabama Football Network

WBRC—960 kc
Birmingham

WOWL—1240 kc
Florence

WGAD—1350 kc
Gadsden

WALA—1410 kc
Mobile

WSFA—1440 kc
Montgomery

WJRD—1150 kc
Tuscaloosa

WTBC—1230 kc
Tuscaloosa



Presented by

Your Texaco Dealer

. . . the best friend you car has ever had!

— 7 —

In 1956 Leland Childs and I were heard on network stations in half a dozen Alabama cities. In later years there were weeks when Alabama radio broadcasts went out regularly on nearly 100 stations and occasionally worldwide.

Georgia Tech won the game by more than one point I would win my bet.

The final score was 10-7, favor of Georgia Tech. Late in the game Alabama tried a field goal which would have earned the Tide a truly-deserved tie. Mixed emotions almost tore me apart as Bama lined up for the kick, but I have to confess that when the try was ruled wide there was a sense of relief—about \$200 worth.

The nadir of the season came in Fort Worth. Vernon Hallbeck, who I would not think of again until that final game in Memphis, was a member of a TCU team that destroyed Alabama. The 28-0 final score was probably as one-sided as a 56-0 decision would be in today's college football game. In fact, had Bama not recovered several fumbles inside the Tide 20-yard line, it might have been on the order of 56-0. Fortunately, practically no one was there to witness it. I remember the Brandino brothers and Fred and Nancy Singleton and Leland Childs and myself noticing there weren't any more of us, although I suspect somewhere there were a few. As they say in show biz, you could have shot deer in the Alabama hotel lobby.

The Singtons were in Texas because they had two sons—Dave and Fred Jr.—on the Alabama team. Fred and Nancy drove over to Dallas to visit friends before the Alabama-TCU game that night. Dallas was jammed because it was Oklahoma-Texas weekend, and Nancy spent a lot of time waving to all the red-and-white Sooner supporters. Thinking they were Alabama backers, she was pleased so many had made the trip. Sadly, Fred broke the news to her.

I had telephoned Dr. Jim McBride, a noted chest surgeon in Fort Worth. He had served in the South Pacific with my father and together they made ten invasion landings as a combat surgical team. Jim asked me to join him and a doctor friend for lunch at the Colonial Country Club, where we would watch the Oklahoma-Texas game on television.

The three of us sat in the back of the men's card room, watching the television set from a distance. In 1957 the state of TV art left something to be desired and the picture was not the best. A few minutes into the game a man got up to adjust the set. I suddenly realized the man was Ben Hogan! I had seen him win the National Open at Merion in 1950 and he was certainly one of my heroes. Suddenly, the doctor friend of Jim McBride, cried out, "Sit down, you little sonofabitch! Get the hell out of the way." I thought he was

joking and looked around at him. He was standing up and visibly angry. "I said for you to sit down," he hollered again.

Jim McBride made an effort to calm his friend. Hogan took a look back over his shoulder, then returned to his seat. I was shocked at the scene. McBride said to his fellow physician, "You ought not to do that to him." The older doctor snorted, "To hell with him. The little SOB doesn't own this place. He can watch his own TV if he doesn't like it."

Another golfing god with cleats of clay.

I recalled with Vernon in Memphis that Alabama came out to warm up in red jerseys. In those days Alabama's red was darker, closer to a wine color. TCU, whose colors are purple and white, came out in the home purple jerseys. I looked down from the press box in the extremely steep TCU stadium and thought there wasn't much differentiation in the two teams (at least in shirt hue). In a while several little groups of trainers and managers were engaged in agitated conversation. When TCU returned from the dressing room after pregame warmups, the Horned Frogs were in white jerseys. Alabama had not brought their road uniforms; it was a small symptom of the miasmic depths to which the Alabama program had sunk.

One pleasant aspect of that TCU team—and college football—was revealed to me by Vernon. Jim Swink, who was a marvelous runner, was an orphan who had been taken under the wing of the late Abe Martin, who coached excellent TCU teams. Abe made sure Swink hit the books as well as opposing football players and today Dr. Jim Swink is a renowned orthopedic surgeon in Fort Worth.

The game that cemented a change in the Alabama football coaching situation was the season finale—the Auburn game on November 30. Auburn simply tore Alabama apart. The Tigers led 34-0 at the half. Alabama was the visiting team on that bitterly cold day, which meant crimson and white clad Tide fans were in the West stands. At intermission, almost to a person, those in the West stands stood and made their way down to the cinder track around the football field en route to the South end zone exit. Instead of the Red Sea parting, the Red Sea simply overflowed from the stadium as if to say "To hell with the Alabama football situation." Something had to be done.

People probably put more faith in Paul Bryant's resurrection capacities than he deserved at that time. Nevertheless, he was the single focus of every Alabama fan's attention and desire. We just simply HAD to have him.

In one of my *Shades Valley Sun* columns in November, 1957, I wrote:

Speculation about Alabama's new coach over the past week has run riot—any other word would be too mild to describe the furor the search has caused. Business phone calls from people throughout the state started with "Who are they gonna get?" Street corner gatherings usually started with "Heard anything about the Bama coach?"

That's the way it was when the search started. Now all comments run: "Are they going to be able to get HIM?" HIM, of course, is Paul W. "Bear" Bryant, Alabama '36, who has become a Messiah to Crimson Tide followers—a man who represents the illustrious past and a promising future for Alabama football. That being the case, it seems likely that some word of the massive weight and degree of this feeling has filtered through to the municipality of College Station, Texas. The belief here is that HIM will be on hand when the pads start popping on Thomas Field this spring. Money is one thing, but being wanted by and having the confidence of thousands upon thousands of people is another. Paul Bryant has that in spades now and it would take an awfully insensitive person to ignore its all-compelling persuasion. It's hard to believe that a man who once played a quarter for Alabama on a broken leg could be that callous or turn a deaf ear to one of the clearest calls (pleas?) in football history.

For a man who first came to Tuscaloosa with one pair of shoes over 25 years ago, it is incredible to think he could resist coming back in singularly unparalleled splendor.

The *Birmingham News* ran big features on the Bryant family, including one full page photographic section on the Texas A&M-

Texas game. Sports Editor Benny Marshall had covered the game. Just seeing Bryant's rugged, handsome face peering out at the football field in those newspaper photographs convinced us he could bring Alabama back and make something of us. Of course, no one could have foreseen the tremendous extent to which he did bring us back; not just back, but to previously unknown and unsought heights.

The University of Alabama's new president, Dr. Frank Rose, was among those who kept dropping broad hints that Coach Bryant would be returning to his alma mater.

Prior to Coach Whitworth's last year a sizeable group of dissident Jefferson County alumni asked for an open meeting to vote on a resolution of "no confidence." Bob McDavid was president of the association and diplomatically handled a rather bombastic meeting, managing to keep an actual vote from being taken. He knew from the University administration that this would be Whitworth's last year and tried to minimize the divisiveness and unhappiness caused by the meeting.

Finally the day came when it was announced that Paul Bryant would be returning to The University of Alabama. His famous statement that "Mama had called" and he was answering was a reality. There is no question he made a sacrifice at the time to come back to Tuscaloosa. His situation at Texas A&M could hardly have been better; he had been close to a national championship and probably would have had it without all the speculation and hullabaloo of the Alabama quest for him; he had been taken in by the Texans, given great reasons (including financial ones) to be proud and happy in College Station; and he had had the Heisman Trophy winner, John David Crow.

I was one of those deeply involved in the Jefferson County Alabama Alumni Association annual banquet. We would have moved heaven and earth to have had Coach Bryant as the speaker, but we couldn't move the date of the banquet. And since it fell on the same day as the Heisman Trophy affair in New York, Bryant would not be in Birmingham. He would be at Mama Leone's Restaurant, a thousand miles away from the Tutwiler Hotel. However, we arranged a special telephone hookup so that Coach Bryant and Mel Allen, an Alabama alumnus and then the voice of the New York Yankees, could make a phone call back to the faithful at the Tutwiler.

The telephone installation man came into the banquet hall that afternoon to doublecheck the connection. He looked around at the red and white bunting, pom poms, and banners, the red and white tablecloths and decorations, and at the black telephone prominently displayed by the speaker's rostrum. He smiled at us and said, "This will never do." He left and returned shortly with a red and white telephone (new at the time) to match the decor.

Hugh Comer was the evening's master of ceremonies. The witty and delightful Avondale Mills industrialist had been thoroughly instructed on timing, that the telephone call from Coach Bryant in the basement at Mama Leone's would be coming through at 9 o'clock. I was the liaison regarding the telephone call and, consequently, had made several calls to Coach Bryant in College Station, giving him the proper timings and cues. He was genuinely apologetic in having to miss the banquet. "You have no idea how much I'd like to be around those recruits y'all will be having up there (legal under NCAA rules then, but no longer). But after all, you don't have a Heisman Trophy winner too many times, and I'm going to be wherever John David is that night." I understood then; and after 25 years of knowing Coach Bryant, I understood even better how important his players were to him.

One function of the annual banquet is to honor the seniors. We had very few that year—perhaps a half dozen—so the banquet feature, the thing everyone was there for, was the phone call from Coach Bryant. Nine o'clock came and went. Mr. Comer did a marvelous job of keeping things going, but every few moments he would look down at the telephone on the dais, and at me with a wondering look. At one point he stopped his presentation and asked, "Did you hear anything ring?" All I could do was shake my head.

It was nearly 10 o'clock when the phone call finally came. The warmth of Coach Bryant's voice and Mel Allen's conversation with him spread a feeling of true euphoria throughout the large room. Coach Bryant hit the ground running even before he hit Alabama ground. His remarks, truly heartfelt, were directed to those recruits he knew were in attendance at the banquet.

Jerry Claiborne, now head football coach at Kentucky, was the advance guard for Bryant, coming into Alabama to attempt to sign up some top players. Among those at the banquet that night was Billy Richardson from Jasper, who had committed to Alabama. Mr.

Richardson was quite agitated because of a telephone call his wife had received from Georgia Tech. As he told it, Tech was saying Billy had promised them he was going to Georgia Tech and they had spent a lot of money bringing him over for football games. Mr. Richardson said he told them if they would send him a bill for exactly what they had spent on Billy he would remit them a check immediately, but Billy was going to Alabama.

There was still some time before Coach Bryant would reach Alabama. Texas A&M had to play Tennessee in the Gator Bowl first. (At that time Tennessee was still a nemesis for him and the Vols took a 3-0 victory.)

Paul and Mary Harmon Bryant drove back from Jacksonville, arriving in Tuscaloosa in early January. Coach Bryant had a meeting with his team, then went back to Texas to collect his belongings.

From the moment of the official announcement, conversation in Alabama was dominated by Bryantisms. And from the time he arrived on the job it was obvious that regardless if you loved him or hated him, you couldn't ignore him. All sorts of wondrous or lurid tales, depending on how you looked at them, were reported by participants and observers of the conditioning program being conducted in Tuscaloosa. Football under Bryant, it was said, would be easy compared to mid-winter wrestling under Bryant. Perhaps surprisingly, most of the players he inherited stuck with the program, although attrition would pick up that spring and the next fall.

I had several opportunities to be with Bryant over the next few months before that first season. Both in private and public gatherings he gave the impression he was not truly happy about having to come back to Alabama; that he was paying back an obligation. His general mien led me to believe he thought he was missing out on the opportunity to cash big chips—oil chips—in Texas. At the time, neither he nor anyone else would know what riches, spiritual and financial, he would derive from having returned to "Mama."

An example of his demeanor came at a barbecue the Birmingham alumni had at the State Fairgrounds to honor him and let him meet the working members of the association. He did not pretend to be enjoying himself; rather that he was suffering through the affair. After making some brief, mumbling remarks, he said he would answer questions. A good friend of mine asked him how he proposed to cure Alabama fumbling. He said, "Do you make the players carry

the ball around the campus and have it stuck to them with glue?" Bryant affixed him with that cold, hard stare we would all learn to recognize (and fear) and after a minute of silence said, "Well, that certainly is a stupid question. Let's see if I can think of a suitably stupid answer." If you presume no more questions were asked that day, you presume correctly.

At the time my employer on the Alabama Football Network was Jerry Johnston, who had been executive secretary for 20 years to Alfred P. Sloan at General Motors. Johnston was a Dartmouth graduate. He had gone to work for a big advertising agency with the Texaco account, and his first job was to set up the southeastern football networks. At one time he had 19 schools from Oklahoma to Virginia under contract. Alabama was not one of the lead dogs, but Bryant's marquee value was recognized and Johnston made a deal with The University to set up Coach Bryant's television show.

Maury Farrell, with whom I worked on the Alabama radio broadcast, was scheduled to be the voice of the television show and I was to be the producer. I met with Coach Bryant one night at a hotel that summer to discuss the details of the show. He couldn't have been more charming. He asked about my family, whom he had known in his student days. Bryant was honestly stunned by his celebrity status in Alabama. For that reason we had dinner in his hotel suite rather than in the hotel dining room. I expected to have every contingency covered following this and other meetings with him. However, he never told me he would narrate the entire show. We had worked diligently with Maury to make sure the play-by-play was done tightly enough so that he could say what was happening while the film was showing the same play. Little did we know that Coach would take the show over; all Maury had to do was get the commercials in and get the show on and off the air on time!

There were many details to be ironed out before the first show—the set, the commercials, and dozens of others. It was a time of extreme nervousness for me. I guess I must have slept sometime in those weeks leading up to the opener, but it was fitfully. I had nightmares of the cameraman not having film in his camera, of the laboratory making a mistake in processing the film and having it come out blank, and every other possible disaster. As it turned out, we had an outstanding cameraman, a man named Loden from Atlanta.



Maury Farrell and I were involved both in the regular radio broadcasts of Alabama's games and also with Coach Bryant's highly-successful Sunday television show.

All the film in those days was done in black and white and he did an excellent job.

During the shows I sat in the announce booth overlooking Maury and Coach Bryant on the set. I had a phone line direct to Maury to relay information to him—time signals, problems, commercial breaks, and whether or not the show's ending needed to be speeded up or stretched out.

The sponsors of "The Bear Bryant Show" that first year were Dr Pepper (Yes, Virginia, Dr Pepper), Holsum Bread, Thompson Tractor Company and the RCA distributor, Bob McDavid, who was an old and dear friend of Coach Bryant.

(Since Coca-Cola and Golden Flake Potato Chips were synonymous with Coach Bryant's show for 24 of the 25 years it was on the air, it may be a surprise that Dr Pepper was a sponsor that first year. I don't know this, but I have an idea that W.W. "Foots" Clements, the head man at Dr Pepper and a native of Northport and a former schoolmate of Bryant's at Alabama, signed up as a gesture of fealty to his old school.

(It was not an easy job to sell all of the commercials for the show, but finally it was done. As it turned out, the sponsors made a hell of a buy. The Bryant Show was the talk of the state every Monday, and his comments were hashed over thousands and thousands of times before the next week's game.)

Finally the great day—September 27, 1958—arrived, and I headed for Mobile and the curtain-raiser for that season and the curtain-raiser for what will almost certainly be the best 25 years of football Alabama will ever have. And perhaps the best that any college football team will ever have.

Ladd Stadium was sold out, and then some. At the time the stadium had wooden bleachers in either end zone. Not after that night! The Bryant era began and life ended for the wooden bleachers. I glanced to my left late in the third quarter and to my astonishment and horror the north end zone wooden bleachers started to sag and then collapsed—just like a cake falling in the oven. I was sure that someone must have been killed, so tightly packed were the spectators. Police cars and ambulances hustled all around the state of confusion. The game was stopped during the rescue operation. Miraculously, no one was mortally or even critically hurt. Somehow it

was another augury of something unique; something strange and exciting in the air.

I've always enjoyed Mobile and doing games from Ladd Stadium, but I must confess that the open air walkway from the elevator and the ladder up to the radio booths were challenges I had to brace myself for. Having a fear of heights and being your basic devout coward anyway, it always seemed to be a long, hazardous journey—especially with a hangover.

I will never regret having made the trek on this particular day; quite the contrary, I relish having been there. The game is still vivid in my mind. Coach Bryant walked onto the field behind his first Bama squad. He walked slowly, casually, with that special John Wayne-like mince of his, slouch hat (the trademark houndstooth hat would come years later) pulled low over his brow, tall, lean—one of the “good guys” you wanted on your side. And, thank heavens, now he was on our side. The sound was deafening as he came from the shadows into the light. I would recall all this in Memphis a quarter of a century later.

The team on the field before him wore crimson jerseys with Northwestern stripes, white helmets with crimson piping. In a couple of years Bryant would modify these uniforms, most notably changing to the crimson helmets.

A great LSU team—Warren Rabb, Billy Cannon, Jimmy Taylor, Max Fugler and company, including the Chinese Bandits defensive unit, would go on to win a national championship—provided the opposition. LSU Head Coach Paul Dietzel had been a member of Bryant's staff at Kentucky and was the first in what would become a long line of pupils taking on the master.

A far superior LSU team would give Dietzel victory in this opener, one of the rarities in the pupil vs. teacher matchups, but the Crimson Tide won the hearts of Alabama fans with absolute maximum effort against overwhelming odds. The Alabama quarterback was Bobby Jackson, a hometown boy. I've always believed that if Jackson had had four full years under Bryant he would have been the first of a long line of great Alabama quarterbacks. As it is, he still had a special place in Bryant's heart, and in mine.

Alabama's conservative offense, swarming defense, and a devastating use of the quick kick by Tommy White and Gary O'Steen kept the Tide in the game. (One of Coach Bryant's favorite stories

concerned University of Alabama Trustee Winton "Red" Blount, one of the South's most prominent men and one of those who was most influential in securing Bryant's return to Alabama. Blount had settled in to watch the Tide and was dismayed that Bryant would call for a quick kick even after a nice gain. At length Blount turned to a fellow Alabama VIP in his box and whispered, "I'm afraid we might have made a grievous error.")

Just before halftime Billy Cannon, who would win the Heisman Trophy, was on an end sweep when he lost control of the football. It slipped up over his shoulder pads and down his back and Bama's left cornerback, Duff Morrison, seized it in midair and returned it down the east sidelines to the LSU 3. Coach Bryant was literally flinging players into the game in an attempt to take advantage of the break. Alabama's offense was unable to punch in a touchdown, but Fred Sington Jr. kicked the first points of the Bryant era.

I had tears in my eyes as the Alabama stands rose as one to roar in delight and jubilation as the Tide took that 3-0 lead to the dressing room at halftime. It had been a long time since Alabama had played the kind of football worthy of this exhuberance.

Although on this night the best team finally won, 13-3, the new beginning was most satisfying to all of us. After our broadcast I went to the airport and made certain that the film got on the airplane for Atlanta. Mr. Loden gave me the schedule of when the film would come to the Birmingham airport so I could pick it up early Sunday.

My trip back to Birmingham was made in a state of high excitement about the way Alabama had played, and high anxiety about whether the film would be waiting for me when I went to the airport baggage room the next day.

Next morning the film was there. First hurdle cleared. I drove as fast as possible (which is faster than legal) up to Channel 6 and previewed the film. It looked super. G-O-O-D F-I-L-M—that's how I spelled relief that day!

When Coach Bryant arrived a short time later he said he had not yet seen the coaching film. In one of the small conference rooms he, Maury and I, along with a technician, Bob Herron, watched in silence. I was confident it was good film, but I wanted to hear it from Coach. From time to time he would ask us to rerun a play, but otherwise had no comments. Finally the film had run its course and

the lights came on. Bryant turned to me and said "That's some of the best film footage I've ever seen." The show had not even begun and already it was a major success in my eyes.

The show would provide a number of memorable Bryantisms over the years. That first year he would compliment a terrific hit with "Merciful Heavens!," and this became a byword. One of the fraternities that year made it its theme for Homecoming.

The next week Alabama battled Vanderbilt to a 0-0 tie. When we previewed the film the next morning Bryant noticed a Tider make an outstanding block on a punt return, then get up and get down field to make another block. He wanted to make sure of the blocker in order to compliment him on the show, so he asked me to rerun the play. I am unmechanical at best, but would stop the projector, put it in reverse, rewind, stop, then run it forward again. I tried this several times, but we were still unable to identify the blocker. My tedious procedure was taking much time and Bryant was becoming impatient. Finally in exasperation he got up and moved me aside, taking over the controls. "Let me try the damn thing," he said, and grasped the forward-stop-rewind handle of the projector. He ran it forward and backward without pause as the gears alternately screeched and moaned in electric agony. At length we determined Goobie Stapp had made the two blocks, but at a cost of the TV station's projector. I thought, "It would be great to be a Bell & Howell or Eastman Kodak salesman and have the Alabama athletics department as one of my accounts."

After three games we were 1-1-1 (Bryant's first Alabama win a 29-6 decision of Furman in Tuscaloosa) and headed for Tennessee. The Vols were also in a down period, but at that point the Volunteers had the Indian sign on Coach Bryant. Tennessee got a 14-7 win that really should have been Alabama's. Two of Alabama's best players had particularly poor games, a back with fumblyitis and a line-man who was lackluster. When the two reported for practice Monday they found they were wearing the colored practice jerseys that marked bottom of the depth chart players. Both quit. That Coach Bryant was absolutely implacable regarding dedication and concentration—even at the cost of losing good football players—was not lost on the rest of the squad.

To say that Paul Bryant had a long memory is an understatement.

ment. Once on his "list," players and acquaintances found it difficult ever to be removed from it!

In September of his first year at Alabama a player whom Bryant and the coaches counted on heavily returned from summer vacation several pounds over the weight he had been instructed to attain. I think it may have been Sam Bailey who told him to collect his gear and move it out of the athletic dorm. The player was stunned by this and asked for a second chance. He was given a day or so to make the weight, but was not allowed to stay in the dorm. At the second weigh-in his weight was still too high and in the rigid, harsh, disciplined regimen there was no room for strayers. He was off the team, his scholarship revoked.

The player, despite his unfortunate transgression, was a bright, decent young man and not a quitter. Although it must have been difficult for him, he got a job as a night bellman at a Tuscaloosa hotel, working from midnight to 7 a.m. while still going to college.

Bert Bank told me this story. He and Coach Bryant entered the hotel around 5:30 one morning heading for the coffee shop for some breakfast. As they passed the bellman/former player, the boy said, "Hello, Coach. Good morning, Mr. Bank." Bert smiled and returned the greeting, but Bryant didn't even glance his way or break stride. This bothered Bert, and, being an outspoken sort, he remonstrated Bryant, saying the boy knew he had made a mistake and Bryant ought not to continue to ignore and derogate him. Bryant looked at Bert with that icy, granite stare and said, "He's a quitter. Hell, I wouldn't let him carry my suitcase in here. If I was supposed to be on the fifth floor, he'd be liable to leave it on the second."

Prior to the show following that Tennessee game, Coach Bryant said he had heard some comments about the deep circles under his eyes (which were certainly evident, and which got deeper and darker as each football season wore on). I suggested makeup, but he said no, that Mary Harmon had reminded him when he did the TV show in Houston with Kern Tips they had had the same problem and alleviated it by having a spotlight affixed to the front of the camera that was shooting him.

I asked Charlie Metcalf, who was director of the show, if he would do this. Charlie, who is a marvelous technician, said that sort

of thing really would not be necessary, that he could adjust the side-lights and overheads to handle the problem. I said the Coach seemed to feel it was important to have a light on the camera, but Charlie assured me he could make it suitable.

After previewing the film we returned to the set about a half hour before airtime. Bryant looked at the camera and, of course, did not see the spotlight he had requested. In response to his inquiry I explained Metcalf was going to do it a different way. Bryant looked at me and said, "Tell him I want a light on this son of a bitch or I'm not going on the air."

He got it.

TIMEOUT

One thing I noticed about the coach was his unpredictability—and I'm sure this trait helped him a lot in winning 323 games. I found myself trying to guess what sort of mood he would be in each Sunday morning when he came up for the replays. Usually I was wrong.

A big win had all of us loose and jovial, but more often than not my greeting to him on such occasions received a laconic "H'lo, John" response.

After a bitter defeat I would dread his arrival, only to see him come in smiling, pat me on the back, and proclaim, "Hello, John, ol' buddy. How you doing today?"

One Sunday he told me he particularly wanted to watch the second quarter of the previous day's game. I knew that he had an offensive tackle he felt was not playing anywhere near his potential (the most cardinal sin in Bryant's mind) and I thought he would be taking a look at him so I planned to watch him, too. Alabama won the game handily. Nevertheless, Bryant watched the second quarter through, then through again, and finally we rolled it a third time. The player I had heard about was a big, strong young man, but even to my inexpert eye it was obvious he was being beaten regularly by his defensive opponent. We were halfway through the third go-around when the tackle made a half-hearted lunge and missed his block completely. "That's it, John," Bryant said cheerily. "That's enough, thanks." He began humming "Love Lifted Me" (a danger sign to all players and assistant coaches) as he made a few notes on the yellow legal pad he always kept with him.

I didn't envy the player's Monday practice. He quit the squad before the next game, transferred to another school, and eventually played professional football for several years. But never again for Alabama.

I am often asked which of the hundreds of Alabama football games I have seen stand out in particular. A surprise answer to many is the 1958 Mississippi State game. That day I became most aware that Crimson Tide players were standing a little straighter, exhibiting confidence, taking on the air of winners instead of the hangdog losers Alabama football players had been for so long.

The game was played at Scott Field in Starkville, then—and even now despite improvements—something of a throwback to an older time in college football. The Starkville games were the last in which Bama traveled to away games by bus. The Tide stayed in Columbus the night before the game, then went the final 20 or so miles Saturday morning. We, too, bused to the game, leaving Birmingham very early Saturday morning. Among the enthusiastic supporters making the trek were a number of close personal friends of the Bryants.

Among those were the Lackeys (Julian and Averette) and Bill and Betty Coleman. We stopped in Columbus at the home of a Bryant teammate from the 1934 team, Son McGahey. Son was in the soft drink bottling business and also the marble quarrying business. It would be hard to forget Son's home; it's the only one I've ever seen with marble siding. We were welcomed graciously and served coffee and other libations. The rest stop provided quite a topic of conversation. A quite elaborate, ornate chair—almost a sedan chair—covered one of the commodes. This johnny was truly a throne!

Starkville remains a bucolic community, but the Bulldog boosters were excited as State was perhaps a two touchdown favorite to beat Alabama. However, the Tide played a super game. Bama's quick kicks were never more powerful. Gary O'Steen averaged almost 60 yards per quick kick, keeping Mississippi State penned up all day. O'Steen earned a ride off the field on his teammates' shoulders following the game.

We got a field goal from Fred Sington and then had the ball down around State's 25. Coach Bryant sent in Norbie Ronsonet, a tall, gangly end from the Mississippi gulf coast, with the play. Jackson told me later that Ronsonet brought in a pass play; Jackson called it, gave the snap count and broke the huddle. Ronsonet, wide-eyed, looked at Jackson and said "What do I do, Bobby?"

Jackson told him, "Go to the end zone, take a left, and I'm going to hit you with a touchdown pass." That's exactly what happened

and Bama's nine points held up for a 9-7 victory. In the lockerroom after the game Coach Bryant passed out cigars and told his players "Today you became men."

Our return trip was great fun. There were several stops along the way to allow those of us with new insight into college football to make telephone calls to get down our bets on the night games. Naturally, we waited for the bus to cross the state line into Alabama before we made those calls!

Georgia was the opposition for the first homecoming game a Bryant team would play. The Bulldogs had a tough squad and it was one of the hardest-hitting games of the year. Bama got an early touchdown, missed on the extra point, but held on to win the first of 25 homecoming games under Bryant. A fight late in the game resulted in one of Georgia's best players, Dave Lloyd, being ejected and the Tide put an insurance touchdown up to win 12-0.

Alabama seemed flat in New Orleans the next week and lost to Tulane, 13-7, to make the record 3-3-1 with three to play. On his television show following that game Coach Bryant praised the team for its effort and noted that if Bama could win two of its last three (which would mean a winning record) the players would deserve a place in heaven. The small, young Tide began that three-game run more determined than anyone realized to earn a spot in that celestial domain.

Georgia Tech in Atlanta was the first hurdle. Bryant and Bobby Dodd are two of the great coaches in college football annals and their teams played classic games in the late fifties and early sixties, going at each other hammer and tongs.

The team arrived in Atlanta for a Friday afternoon workout. It was Tech's homecoming game. I went on the team bus from the Biltmore to the workout. As we bused to practice we saw the fraternity houses all decorated in gold and white and crimson. One house had its decorations on a scaffold, which had come loose from its moorings and was dangling dangerously some 20 feet above the ground. A player sitting across the aisle from me remarked, "Well, the engineering of that Tech decoration doesn't look too hot to me."

Georgia Tech had finished its workout and a number of the Yellow Jackets, including All-America center Maxie Baughan, were hanging around to watch Bama's practice. Alabama did not wear

pads for the workout, and instead of the standard gray sweat-clothes the players were decked out in outfits that looked like crimson Chinese pajamas. Bama players were small, and in those getouts they really looked small.

A few of the Tech coaches came out to visit with Bama staff members. One of the first to arrive was Tonto Coleman, who would later become Southeastern Conference commissioner. At length the tall, impressive figure of Bobby Dodd, slouch hat bent over face, walked down the west stands steps and went over to shake hands with Bryant. Bryant grinned and said "Bobby, I was really hoping you wouldn't come by here and see those little old skinny boys. I know I ought to be ashamed to be bringing them over here to play a team like yours." Dodd smiled back and said, "Paul, you beat me in Lexington several years back, 27-7, and you could have made it 50, but you took pity on me." Then, the smile growing wider, Dodd continued, "I've always wanted to be able to return the favor."

After the workout and while the players were showering and changing, Pat James and I strolled around the Grant Field turf. He approached the 15-yard line in the southeast corner and pointed to



Hack Lloyd, Maury Farrell, John Forney, Bert Bank and engineer Bob DuPriest moments before an early Paul Bryant-coached Alabama football game.

a spot. "Right there is where I really slugged old George Morris when I was at Kentucky." Pat laughed and said, "Then I went over to the referee and said, 'Mr. Referee, that middle linebacker's been punching me out on every play. Can't somebody call something on him?' " Sure enough, said Pat, the very next play Morris sought him out, drilled James with a good right hand, and was thrown out of the game. Knowing the great player Morris was, I'm sure Pat's ruse was a very important part of the Kentucky game plan.

I had gone to Atlanta with several stags, and we went out bar-hopping Friday night, hoping perhaps to run across Kim Novak or Jeanne Crain or their identical twins, who would no doubt succumb to our obvious charms. Strangely enough, this did not happen. Instead we found ourselves in a place called the Bayou Club near Peachtree Street. As we walked in there was a voice, heard but not seen, inviting us to "Come right in, gentlemen." The source of the voice was a black midget doorman, hardly visible, who escorted us to our table. It was no great surprise to find a group of Alabama sportswriters already on hand. A couple of them were slumped in their seats, heads on the bandstand, so exhausted were they from upholding high standards of journalistic integrity in an evil and alien world.

The lobby of the Biltmore on game day was crowded with Tide faithful, having Bloody Marys and other bits of liquid Dutch courage before going out to see what they honestly expected would be a Tech win. Bob McDavid, Jesse Drennen, Carl Adams, and a number of other very loyal Alabama people were there and had gotten together a pot. For \$5 one could pick the total score of the game. I signed up. Previous to that week I had dreamed that Alabama had beaten Tech 15-10, so I took the total number of points as 25. Then Maury and I walked down the hill and over to the press gate at Grant Field.

Assistant coaches were each assigned a specific game prior to the season. It was that coach's job to know the opponent better than he knew Alabama—strengths, weaknesses, tendencies, techniques, everything! This was Gene Stallings' game, as it would be throughout his Alabama stay, and he always did a terrific job. This year he had the small and youthful Tide warriors as fired up as any Japanese Kamikaze suicide squads ever were.

Alabama kicked off to Tech and one of the special teams players,

with no regard for his body, flung himself into the midships of the Tech runner. The ball popped loose, Alabama recovering deep in Tech territory and cashing the break with a touchdown. After the next kickoff Bama forced another fumble and converted that into a field goal. A little later, but still in the first quarter, Tech fumbled to Alabama once again. Bama began to punch and Bobby Jackson capped it with a beautiful keeper to the left, seemingly toying with Tech defensive backs until he could dance into the corner of the end zone. Alabama led 17-0 at the end of the first quarter. That stunning score must have brought gasps throughout the knowledgeable college football world as it was flashed around America on radio and television.

Bama now fell back on defense and the quick kicks of Tommy White and Gary O'Steen. I was rooting for a shutout, but Tech finally got a march going and scored. When the Jackets lined up to go for a two-point conversion I realized if they made it the score would be 17-8—a total of 25 points. I confess I was hoping for their success because I was sure there was no chance of Tech overtaking Alabama that day. The pass was good, Alabama won 17-8, and when I returned to Birmingham I pocketed about \$85.

The next week Alabama beat Memphis State, 14-0, assuring a winning season in Bryant's first year.

TIMEOUT

Coach Bryant's topics to the Birmingham Monday Morning Quarterback Club varied all over the lot in his 25 years. Usually he spoke after the Tide's next to last game, in the open week prior to the Auburn game. One constant is that no speaker ever drew a bigger crowd than the annual Bryant appearance.

It was always anyone's guess what he might choose to address, but as in so many areas regarding Coach Bryant, surprise was the rule rather than the exception. For example, if the impending bowl situation was of most interest, Coach Bryant—who more than anyone else decided not only Alabama's bowl game, but, keyed like dominoes, the matchups of several other bowls—would be almost certain to say nothing about bowl games.

It was before this group that he made his first public statement regarding his intention to stay at Alabama long enough to break the 314 college football victory record held by Amos Alonzo Stagg. He prefaced his remarks by noting that in college football, no one person is responsible for victory, that players, assistant coaches, students, alumni, fans, the band, ad infinitum go into a successful program. This was standard Bryant fare. "But," he added, "if someone's got to have his name on the record, it might as well be me."

Some years he would provide a series of reminiscences, delivered quite perfunctorily, followed by a hasty exit.

Other years he would seem to be in a mellow mood and would stay and answer the dozens of questions the audience always wanted to ask him. Although he always gave some answer, it was frequently not the way the questioner would desire.

Bryant was not in a particularly good mood in one of his early appearances at the old Tutwiler Hotel, either the first or second, but he said he would accept a few questions. From the back of the room Boots Silverfield—who ran the men's department at Burger-Phillips for many years—stood up and shouted, "Why don't you throw more passes?"

Coach Bryant didn't hesitate. "Why don't you sell more suits?"



JEFFERSON COUNTY'S HIGH SCHOOL AWARD WINNERS WITH CAPTAIN JOHN FORNEY
 ... From left, Tarrant Coach Buddy Hearn and ace John O'Rear, West End's Denton and Forney

Jack O'Rear's brother, John, was winner of the Monday Morning Quarterback Club's outstanding high school football player award in Jefferson County the year I served as club captain. John chose to take a professional baseball contract rather than a Bama football scholarship.



The Monday Morning Quarterback Club had outstanding speakers, such as Southern Cal Head Coach John Robinson who posed with Doug Layton, Jerry Duncan and me, but the far-and-away headline attraction each year was Paul W. Bryant.

Just one year after Alabama had been in the depths, embarrassed by Auburn's national championship team, the underdog Tide took on the Tigers. Bryant unveiled the whoopee pass, a variation of something Jack Curtice had been using at Utah, and Bama gained great gobs of yardage up the middle against Auburn All-Americans Zeke Smith and Jackie Burkett. Auburn was too strong and won the game, 14-8, but Alabama people had a heart-stopping thrill near the end of the game as Bobby Jackson lofted a high pass that Jerry Spruiell could not quite hang on to down at the Auburn goalline.

Maury and I stayed in the press box long after that game talking about what a marvelous year it had been and how bright the Alabama future appeared under Coach Bryant. Our booth was just a few yards above the VIP boxes in Legion Field and down below we could see Big Jim Folsom, the colorful governor of the state at that time, trying to make his way out of the stadium.

It was no secret that Big Jim enjoyed an occasional cocktail, and on this particular day it appeared he had enjoyed a number of them. His retinue gathered around the imposing figure of a man in black chesterfield and homburg hat. A couple of highway patrolmen and his family were assisting him as he made his way down the steps to the waiting patrol car. Big Jim made it about 20 rows, then began to sway like a tower in a high wind. He keeled to the right, where he was grabbed by one of the patrolmen. He was carried the rest of the way to the car.

We caught sight of Coach Bryant, who came out of the Legion Field dressing room and into the gloaming. His face was unmoved as he looked over the scene, the near-empty stadium where his Tide had fought the good fight. Then he turned and disappeared into the night.

At the final television show that first year, Coach Bryant brought his eight seniors and introduced them and chatted briefly with each of them on the air. This was a bit impromptu, but certainly appropriate.

Prior to going on the air that day, he brought the senior group into our viewing room and, after we had taken a look at the film of the previous day's exciting Auburn game, he pulled out his personal checkbook. He wrote each boy out a check for \$50 and gave them out.

“None of you is going to play basketball or baseball this year, so as far as I’m concerned your amateur career is over,” he said. “You’re going to be with me on the air today and this is a commercial program.” His face was serious as he added, “From now on, don’t do anything for free. Make sure you get paid fairly for it.”

TIMEOUT

In 1923 the Jefferson County Alabama Alumni Association began a tradition of an annual banquet to honor the Alabama football team. The seniors of each team were awarded fine watches. When Coach Bryant returned the practice was for the entire team to attend the banquet and the coach would have the players parade around the room to be applauded and ogled by the Tide faithful. Later I learned the players considered this an absolute chore (I can understand that, but the alumni who were footing the bill enjoyed it). Finally Coach Bryant ended the practice, making attendance mandatory only for the seniors.

Coach Bryant always introduced the seniors individually and always had a few personal comments on each player to pass along to the alumni. At these meetings, too, Coach Bryant was a master of keeping people off base. Just as he never gave his opponents on the football field what they expected, he almost always surprised the alumni with his topic—including making a non-speech when he took a notion to do so.

NCAA rules now prohibit the practice, but there was a time when high school senior prospects were banquet invitees. The banquet was held in early December, about a week prior to the conference signing date. Jerry Duncan, who was a mighty mite tackle for Bama in the mid-sixties and who went on to business success and to a position with us on the Bama radio network, and I were in attendance at one such banquet when Bill "Brother" Oliver, a Tide assistant coach, approached us. He said that he had a real fine prospect in tow, but that he was having a hard time getting him to commit to Alabama; that Auburn was very, very much in the picture; and that he needed Coach Bryant to come over and say a few words to him.

The prospect was Tim Travis of Hueytown, a big, fine-looking specimen. He was wearing a sports jacket and green bowtie and seemed to be a friendly, polite young man. Oliver whispered, "For Lord's sake, please try to get Coach Bryant to come over and at least say hello to him when this banquet's over." We assured him we would do our best.

As always, Coach Bryant was hounded by the autograph seekers at the end of the program. Finally we got to him and maneuvered

him through the crowd to where Brother Oliver had Tim Travis waiting. It was obvious Coach Bryant, who was a good recruiter in spite of his distaste for the chore, did not relish fulfilling Oliver's request. When we reached them, Oliver said, "Coach Bryant, I want you to meet Tim Travis. He's a real fine tight end and linebacker from Hueytown High School and we really need to have him in our program."

Coach Bryant didn't say a word. He stuck out his hand to Tim. Eyes big as saucers, Tim took it and the two silently shook hands. Tim was almost as tall as Coach so it was just about an eye level situation; and Coach Bryant's steel gray eyes were staring right through the youngster.

Oliver broke the silence. "Coach, Tim really wants to come with us but he's getting a lot of pressure from the people across the state; I mean a lot of pressure, and it's been tough; it's really been tough."

Bryant remained silent for another moment, then looked at Travis even harder and said, ostensibly to Oliver but actually to Travis, "He'd better be tough if he's going to come down and put on that red shirt."

It either works or it doesn't. In the case of Tim Travis it did. He played tight end, starting his last two years, and played a big part in two wins over Tennessee.

One year his remarks were reminiscences of his own college days at Alabama. He spoke of rooming with Don Hutson, told funny anecdotes, including the story of their ill-fated dry cleaning business. Primarily, though, he spoke of Mary Harmon. He told of the first time he saw her in the old Supe Store, how she was then and now the prettiest lady he had ever seen. It was a tender, sentimental talk and the audience was hushed, listening intently. I had the feeling he was trying to "reach out and touch someone." I hope he did.

1959

The general excitement and enthusiasm of the first Bryant year carried over to the fall of 1959, and all of us Alabama football nuts could hardly wait to get under way. Coach Bryant scheduled two-a-day practices starting in late August. The team would work out at 5 in the morning and again late in the afternoon, but even at that there is precious little relief from Tuscaloosa heat.

Finus Gaston was Alabama's sports information director, one of the few men retained in the department when Coach Bryant returned (trainer Jim Goostree was another). Bryant's sports information director at Texas A&M, Jones Ramsey, had moved on to Texas, which may have been the reason Finus kept his post. Finus, a delightful guy, was like just about everyone else on the Alabama staff or close to the athletics operation. He had a number of emotions when it came to Bryant—adoration, respect, awe, and terror. And the greatest of these for Finus was terror. Looking back on those days and the relationship of Finus to Coach Bryant is reminiscent of the play "Mr. Roberts." Ensign Pulver managed to avoid the captain he feared so much that when the captain finally ran into the ensign on deck he hardly knew who he was. Certainly Coach Bryant knew about Finus (and was very fond of him), but Finus avoided him as much as possible and spoke of him in hushed, fear-tinged tones.

The second day of practice (in those days there were no warmup days in sweatclothes; the men came in hitting) a couple of us drove down to Tuscaloosa to see how things were going. I asked Finus how the first day of practice had gone. Finus's eyes grew large. "At 5 a.m.," he said, "The Man got the team around him and held up a football. He told them 'We're going to find out right quick who wants this.' Then he threw it up in the air." Finus paused in quiet, solemn remembrance. "Five seconds later there were assholes flying all over the place."

The Tide team hit, hit and hit again, and the boys in their crew cuts began to resemble nothing so much as survivors of the battleground. We were sure they were ready, but opening at Athens Bama played a poor game—including giving up a long run for a score, which was anathema to Bryant and company—and was beaten by Georgia, 17-3.

The next week Houston was the opposition at Houston. The game was played in beautiful Rice Stadium on the campus of Rice Institute. The Alabama team stayed at the Shamrock, which at the time was THE swank new hotel of Houston. We all enjoyed roaming through the palatial structure.

The Friday night before the Saturday game, a number of native Alabamians who were transplanted to Texas had a cocktail party in a suite at the Shamrock and several of us from Birmingham were invited. Maizie Sale, a legendary beauty at The University in the early 1940s, was there with her husband, who had retired from the Flying Tigers of General Clare Chennault. Not a man in the room failed to notice Maizie. She was a tiger in her own right.

I was introduced to a neat, handsome young man who had played for Bryant at Texas A&M. He drew a coterie of followers who wanted to know about Coach's legendary days in Aggieland. The young man, who was a sales representative for IBM, paused before replying. We were taken aback when he finally said, "Well, I hated him." He continued. "I really did. I played for him four years. I never started, but I never missed practice; I never missed a day. I went to Junction and came back. I did the whole bit.

"I hated him, but I was determined he would not beat me. I would wake up every morning and he was in my thoughts from the first. I would tell myself, 'He is not going to break me.' I said that to myself every day. 'He is not going to break me.' And he never did."

To say that those of us in the thick of Bryant's adoration society were certainly surprised is a considerable understatement, but we were also impressed with the young man's sincerity. He continued: "I really mean that. But I'll say this. If he walked in that door over there and yelled out, 'All Aggie exes up to the top of this building and jump off.'" He paused and his voice took on a special determination. "Well, John David Crow might beat me up there, but he's the only son of a bitch that would."

(The end of that story came 20 years later when I emceed the

luncheon for Birmingham's Hall of Fame—now All-American—Bowl. Texas A&M was to play Iowa State. The two teams were guests, as well as a large crowd, but executives from the two schools sat at the dais. One of the men from A&M was very familiar to me, but I couldn't quite place him. Just before the luncheon was to begin I had a glimmer. I went over to him and asked him if he had ever been with IBM. "Yes," he said, "I was with IBM when I first got out of college." I asked if he recalled going to a cocktail party in the Shamrock Hotel when Alabama was in town for the Houston game. He nodded his head and said he did.

(The man was Marvin Tate, who at the time was the director of athletics for Texas A&M. I reminded him of his soliloquy, and he smiled in remembrance. "I'm sure I did say that," he said, "but you know I wanted very much to get over to Tuscaloosa to see the Coach this trip. I haven't been able to." He spoke very warmly of Coach Bryant, then after the luncheon came over to me and said, "The next time you see Coach Bryant, tell him he'll always be my coach.")

The next night Alabama won its first game of 1959 by a score of 3-0 in what must have been one of the duller games in college football history. But it was a W!

After the game Johnny Mitchell threw a big party for the Alabama bunch, and fortunately I was included. This was a real Texas-style barbecue under a big Lone Star State moon. There were tubs of ribs, beans and all kinds of good things.

That year I was producing "The Bear Bryant Show" again. Coach Bryant had a longtime friendship with Crawford Johnson and Preacher Franklin of the Coca-Cola Company in Birmingham and they had come on board as sponsor that year, replacing Dr Pepper. Golden Flake became the other primary sponsor. Golden Flake advertising was handled by a local agency, Frank Taylor. It was obvious that the giant agency in Atlanta handling Coca-Cola was not happy having to come up with commercials and trafficking on what was basically a local show and the copy they sent to us for the Bryant program was inferior. We knew better things could be done. Frank Taylor wisely began to tie the two—Coca-Cola and Golden Flake—together, and the "Great Pair" began its gestation

period, to become fully operational the next year.

Throughout my association with Coach Bryant I learned valuable lessons. One I learned that year was, plainly and simply, to do what you are supposed to do when you're supposed to do it; don't delay or equivocate.

Our photographer who was shooting our game film, Mr. Loden of Atlanta, was anxious to get the rights to do the films the coaching staff used. This involved using different lenses and shooting wider angle shots of the field, and shooting the offense and defense separately. He asked me if I would intercede and try to set up an appointment with Coach Bryant for him.

Being like Finus Gaston, I tried to avoid the Coach whenever possible, but felt we owed Loden something because he had done a first class job on the film. I called Coach Bryant and told him of the request. He said he would be happy to meet with us. I drove to Tuscaloosa with Loden and we went into Coach Bryant's imposing office. Coach Bryant had some very nice things to say about Loden's work on the film for the television show. Seeing an opening, Loden said, "Coach, I appreciate that and I'd like to talk to you about getting to shoot your coaching films."

Bryant was fully prepared. He said, "I can appreciate that and I wish we could work this out. However, we must have the film by 6 in the morning and it's my understanding that the soonest you could have the film to us is 7. We feel that would be too late. Therefore, we're going to have to pass, but I want to thank you for your interest and hope you'll keep doing the fine job you have on the TV film."

End of interview. There was no wishy-washiness, no "Let me check this out," no "Let me turn this over to my film coach and he'll be in touch with you." It was cut and dried; it could not be done. Loden left understanding completely why he could not compete. He probably felt Coach Bryant had done him a favor.

Alabama entered the final three-game stretch with a record of four wins, one loss and two ties. Georgia Tech was to furnish the opposition in Birmingham November 14.

Gene Stallings was one of my favorites on the coaching staff, but he certainly didn't put me in a good mood when he spoke to a meeting of the Alabama Alumni on Friday night before the game. He went into great detail about what a great football team Georgia

Tech had and how Alabama had no business being on the field with them. I don't question Gene's sincerity, but perhaps he overacted a little.

Following the meeting he and I and our wives went to dinner in the Continental Room there in the Tutwiler. I thought now I would get the real story and spent the evening trying to draw him out on what sort of chance we had against Tech. I had heard they were better than Alabama, but I was looking for confidence-bolstering. It was too late for me, anyway; I already had a sizeable wager down on Alabama. Gene continued to poormouth and I went home late that night feeling I had made one of my classic betting boners.

The next afternoon, in a magnificent defensive battle, Bama beat Tech, 9-7. I was one of a handful of Alabama followers hanging around the Alabama dressing room as the players and coaches came out. Pat Trammell's parents were there. Mrs. Trammell was a woman of iron will. It is no exaggeration to say she might have been the female equivalent to Paul Bryant. No one leaving that dressing room beamed brighter than Gene Stallings. As he walked along the chainlink fence he turned to me with a big smile and said, "See, there. I told you we were going to beat 'em."

Alabama won the next week, but Memphis State was probably robbed. The final score was 14-7 as on the final play of the game the officials ruled that State quarterback James Earl Wright's dive into the end zone was short of a touchdown. Almost no one (except the officials) with any sort of view of the play thought Bama had stopped the lunge. Had it been any place but Tuscaloosa, the Tide probably would have had three ties that year. Alabama did not play well at all, perhaps owing to a letdown after the big Tech game, perhaps because the entire state was looking ahead to the Auburn game. The feeling in the Alabama camp was that the Tide was going to beat the Tigers for the first time in what seemed like a long, long time. The reason it seemed that way is because it had been—1953.

For Auburn, Coach Bryant always had a wrinkle or two the Tigers hadn't seen and couldn't anticipate. This year it was using little Marlin "Scooter" Dyess as a wide out. Scooter had more speed than anyone on the field for either team. He was a diminutive player, but he had the famous big heart.

At that time the north end of Legion Field had not been horse-shoed; wooden bleachers were the end zone seats. The concrete

stands along the west side started with section AA. EE was the prime 50-yard area and tickets in that section were prized to every Alabama game. A friend of mine didn't have such a good seat. For the 1959 Auburn game he sat in seat 1, row 1, section AA—in other words, the lowest seat and the furthestest seat from midfield, right in the coffin corner of the north end zone. He told me later all he saw that day was Auburn players going to and from the dressing room and the smile on Scooter Dyess' face when he took a pass and ran it in right in front of him from 45 yards out. Tommy Brooker added a field goal, the Tide defense was its usual granite self, and the drought had been broken, 10-0, on a deliriously happy afternoon.

The feeling was that a win in the Auburn game would be good for a Gator Bowl bid. Coach Bryant returned to the Bankhead Hotel to await the call. It never came. Instead, Alabama received a call from the fledgling Liberty Bowl, to be played in mid-December in Philadelphia's Municipal Stadium. The Tide accepted the challenge.

The morning following the Auburn game I took a tape recorder down to Coach Bryant's room at the Bankhead so he could record his half-hour radio program, which was syndicated throughout Alabama and into a few neighboring states. The pressure and demand for Alabama-Auburn tickets has always been bad, but somehow that year when Alabama partisans sensed a win, the demand for tickets was absolutely incredible. I had spent a good part of the two weeks before the game dealing with scalpers, wheedling tickets anywhere I could, for clients around our advertising agency and for friends. Finding tickets for the game was a nightmare; and still is.

I sat patiently in the Bryant suite that Sunday morning while the Coach, clad in a robe and fancy silk pajamas, recorded his program. When he was finished I packed up the equipment and began to walk out. As I passed one of the bureaus I noticed on top a modest stack of tickets—unused—and they were all in EE. The ticket manager always saves the coach some tickets for game day so that if he sees some old players or friends or gets an emergency call he will always have a few ducats to spare. Man, how I wished he could have spared me those a few days before the game!

I could probably have retired years ago if I could just have accepted the price of a ticket from those who have asked if they could carry my equipment into the press box for me.

TIMEOUT

From time-to-time I have been asked about preparation for a football broadcast. Although I had a specific routine for each game, my preparation for Alabama broadcasts actually began well over 50 years ago. I spent my boyhood in Tuscaloosa and my early memories are dominated by Alabama football. Johnny "Hurry" Cain, the fullback/punter from the early thirties, was my first hero and I am left-footed, I am sure, because of him. (Although now about the only kicking I do is kicking the gong around.)

Someone gave me the helmet of Ben Smith from the 1931 team, and somehow I managed to misplace it. I still remember the tears its loss caused. I devoured every word of my crimson heroes on the sports pages of the Age-Herald and the News of both Birmingham and Tuscaloosa and virtually memorized that first of the football magazines, The Illustrated Football Annual.

I have only vague memories of Wallace Wade, primarily the resentment in the community about him leaving to go to Duke. But I remember Coach Frank Thomas and Coach Paul Burnum and Coach Red Drew and Coach Happy Campbell vividly. And I remember a touchdown pass from Dixie Howell to Don Hutson against Howard College that started Alabama on the road to the 1935 Rose Bowl. Jimmy Walker from that team dated my next door neighbor. He and Bubba Nisbet (later a team captain and who married a Tuscaloosa girl) were frequently in our neighborhood and occasionally threw a football with me and Bill O'Connor. There really wasn't much more one could want out of life!

When my uncle, Richard Foster, became president of The University he took me to many games (sitting on the 50 can be habit-forming) and on trips I was able to meet the likes of Cary Cox, Noah Langdale, Leroy Monsky, Holt Rast, Charley Boswell, Vic Bradford, Herky Mosley, Jimmy Nelson and on and on.

One of my childhood acquisitions was a boxed game with a large green football field. It was meant for two people to play, one representing each team, and a throw of three dice determined play selection. I would take the rosters of teams from The Football Illustrated Annual and play the game by myself, broadcasting play-by-play for hours at a time. I did Pitt-Duke games, Harvard-Yale,

Southern Cal-Notre Dame and, of course, Alabama-Tennessee. In the latter, Alabama seemed to always win regardless of the throw of the dice. (Actually, during those years Messrs. George Cafego, Sam Bartholemew, Bob Suffridge and Ed Molinski had a nasty habit of reversing these scores in the fall.)

By the time I came to the Alabama radio booth a lot of preparation and recall were stored in the computer of my brain. The spotting boards I made up in 30 years of Alabama broadcasts were not too different from what I had done as a 10 or 11-year old. I made it a practice to do my own spotting boards. Even though my printing may leave something to be desired, I felt it helped me to remember numbers and pertinent facts about the players if I had done it myself.

I always spent one night updating the Alabama boards (Coach Bryant made so many position changes from week-to-week it was necessary). I did boards for the opponents based on two-deep lineups provided me by their sports information department. In each block I would write the player's number with a large, brightly colored Pentel and his last name in a different colored, broad-stroked Pentel. Around this I would fill in first name, class, height, weight and

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4 PUGH 78 BAYDELETTE 70 BROCK 57 STEPHENSON 60 BOOTHE 63 BUNCH 88 TRAVIS
 25 COLEMAN 72 MC COMBS 62 ALLISON 55 HUFSTETLER 67 COWELL 76 VINES 8 NEAL¹²
 32 BOLTON 61 ROBBINS 69 SEARCH 53 BARNES 79 FAUST 87 KROUT
 80 CLARK

1 HOLT 77 11 RUTLEDGE 60 117 50 3 CHAPMAN
 2 UMPHREY 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100
 11 22 NATHAN 105 742 7.2 33 1230 7.2 27 30 86
 30 IKNER 30 86
 24 JONES 70 323 4.6 45 WHITMAN 96 634 33 JACKSON 35 TURPIN

6 MELROY 33 36 5-8
 42 OGILVIE 31 477 8
 41 FERGUSON
 21 HANEY

While the action takes place on the field, the information about those performing is contained in great part on spotting boards prepared prior to each game.

hometown. I would have room left to pencil in other things—number of tackles made going into the game, passes caught and the yardage, etc. Sometimes the boxes would get pretty crowded. Ideal names were “Keith PUGH” or “Wayne COOK.” It was those GERASIMCHUKs and GELLERSTEDTs that caused problems.

Games against LSU or Penn State present special problems because of the unusual names. Most football press guides have pronunciations guides giving phoenetic spellings of the difficult names (for several years the LSU press guide had a listing entitled “O, Them Ell Ess You Names”). Working the boards in solitude almost always brought up questions to be addressed—and almost always answered—by the respective sports information directors, those most, most valuable people to broadcasters and writers.

We also added little “tabs” to our boards—past series record of Alabama and its opponent, conference and national rankings of the two teams, average team weight comparisons, recaps of the season for the two teams, and perhaps a message or two (such as a “thanks for the letter” or “get well soon” to a child or longtime Bama fan).

These were done on pre-printed heavy cardboard—one for offense (seven man front and diamond back) and one for defense (five man front, three linebackers, two corners and a safety). These were thumbtacked to two cork boards—the offense of Alabama and the defense of the opponent coming up together and vice versa, so the spotter could just flip them over when the ball changed hands.

I never felt I needed a spotter for Alabama, but always liked having a spotter for the opponent. I always had confidence that I knew the Alabama players well. Several times each year, in the spring and again during fall drills, I made the trek to Tuscaloosa in order to watch practice and familiarize myself with the Tide players. Because they did not wear numbers on their practice jerseys, I learned to recognize them by their physique and the way they ran.

My primary problem as a broadcaster was field position. For example, I might say a punt was received at the 12 when actually it was the 7. A play-by-play man can't wait until the linesman or field judge spots the football to give the yard line, so I was sometimes off a yard or so. I always knew who was doing something; I always had to check to see where they were doing it!

Gary Ray, a scholarshiped player from Sylacauga, received a

head injury which ended his playing days. Gary was an outstanding young man and the coaches wanted him to feel a part of things. I was asked to use him as a spotter my first play-by-play year, 1965, and I was happy to do so. He did a fine job, but by-and-large players are not good spotters. They get too wrapped up in situations and tend to be cheerleaders rather than helpful to you. Over the years my spotters included Stan and Don Siegal, my son John III, Jimmy Bank and Tom Roberts and they were all excellent. A spotter checks the opponent and also notes things that are hard to catch while trying to follow the ball—a good block (indicated by a quick forward thrust of an elbow and then pointing to the number on the spotting board), a key defensive play (which isn't always the man who finishes up the tackle), and so on. A good spotter will instinctively know a play-by-play man is looking for some information; and will get it.

With Tom Roberts as spotter the broadcaster can depend on getting yardage information. Immediately following a punt and return he pushes a slip of paper in front of the broadcaster. It reads simply "43-7," which means it was a 43-yard punt and 7-yard return. Then, if you have your alleged wits about you, you might say confidently, "Thirty-six yards net on the kick."

The Alabama board was always at the elbow of the color man—Stan Siegal and then Doug Layton for me. They were both quick to pick up something to add to the broadcast.

I don't think we had any significant faux pas in the 18 years I did play-by-play. Doug Layton often recounts a story that during a rather dull Alabama-South Carolina game I kept referring to it being "Tulane's ball" or "out of bounds at the Tulane 19." During a timeout he asked me if I had a bet on Tulane. I nodded yes. "Thought so," he replied.

The Forney-Layton-Duncan team was an admittedly high-spirited trio and one of us could be counted on to have some spirits to enjoy after going off the air. That could be called post-game preparation. I would like to state emphatically (regardless of how it may have sounded!) that not once in my 30 years of broadcasting did I ever have a drink—even so much as a sip of beer—before a game. The days leading up to night games were interminable for us!

Once a few years ago Alabama was losing, and as the scores of other games came in there were indications that far more losses

than wins would come up on our bet list. There was a pained look on Layton's face as he gave a time-out cue for a network break. Engineer Jimmy Jones was a bit slow in cutting away and Doug's dulcet and melodious tones came plaintively over the network: "You bring any Scotch, John?"

So, Paul Bryant had completed two years at the coaching helm reviving both Alabama football and its followers. After the Auburn game my column in the *Shades Valley Sun* was a mythical letter to "Mama" reporting on those two years. Here it is:

Dear Mama,

Well, it has been just about two years since you called me back to Tuscaloosa and I figured that now might be a real good time to send along a status report of what's happened since then.

We got here in early January and about the first thing indicated was a remodeling and modernizing of the coaches' offices. This was begun and in the meantime a wrestling team was reinstated at The University. It was gratifying that a number of our football players went out for that team.

We started spring training late that year because our coaches wanted to screen previous films as much as possible to get a good idea of what our existing personnel could do; what their strengths and weaknesses were.

Also we felt that the warmer weather would help us get them in the proper condition. Speaking of warm weather. . .and Tuscaloosa's got that in spades. . .it was our intention to have the athletic dormitory air conditioned and through the generosity of our alumni, this was done that summer.

During the summer we hit the road pretty good, looking for some junior college personnel to bolster up some of the spots on our squad and we were fortunate to find several boys who filled that bill.

When football season rolled around that year we figured we had some kids who could play defense and that our kicking game was sound. The most points we had scored on us was 14 that year, and with Bobby Jackson coming through real good, we generated an offense of sorts and won five games. Our punting was among the best in the nation.

We had a little crisis after the Tennessee game that year and had to make some personnel changes which

worked out for the better and, all in all, I guess it was a pretty good year for a starter. Auburn beat us 14-8, but we gave them a fair tussle.

Our kids celebrated the season with an A Club Dance with Lester Lanin's orchestra doing the honors and, generally speaking, we felt that we were on the track and had the boys with the talent and desire to give what it takes to win.

We made some progress in the spring and knew that we would have to go heavily with sophomores. All of us thought a lot about our team during the summer, and I guess I must have written out several different lineups a couple of thousand times.

We had an early start against a good Georgia team this year and they put it on us, 17-3, and even ran a long touchdown against us. But we were fortunate to regroup a bit after that one and settle down for the other nine games. There were a couple of ties in there and we won the rest. Last Saturday we won the big one, 10-0 over Auburn, and finished up with seven wins, one loss and two ties.

Our pass defense was the best in the country and we were in the top five in overall defense. Since the Georgia game we haven't been scored on in the second half.

Also I'm very pleased that we have a good majority of our team coming back next year.

And just this week we accepted the Liberty Bowl invitation in Philadelphia. I feel that our kids will make you proud of them.

So that pretty well brings us up to date. There've been some rough spots and we all had our doubts from time to time.

But I think that, all in all, these are the chores you called me back to do and I feel we're pretty much on schedule.

I hope you agree.

Your son,

Paul

That first bowl game was memorable because we went to New York with a group of people and then took the train over to Philadelphia on the morning of the game. The Alabama team was staying at the Bellview Stratford, and we rendezvoused there preparatory to going out in the chill.

It's ironic that the three coldest bowl games Alabama played in under Coach Bryant were all Liberty Bowls—in Philadelphia, then in Memphis against UCLA, and the finale against Illinois in '82. It was cold as a Klondike midnight as we caught a cab out to the stadium. Walking towards the gate we saw some friends who had come over from New York in real style. Walter Perry, Harry deBuys and Hugh Morrow Jr. and III had been staying at the Regency on Park Avenue. They rented a Cary Cadillac to come over to Philadelphia. The long, sleek limousine had a liveried driver and Harry proudly opened the trunk to show us the spread the Regency had provided for them. There were pheasant sandwiches, chunks of beef tenders on rolls, and pots of pate' with little foreign crackers. All this in a fancy wicker basket, along with a very fancy wine (I believe it was a Rose' in honor of the Crimson Tide); and the Morrrows had brought along a case of Jack Daniels Black just in case the cold became overwhelming.

We agreed that this foursome indeed understood what first class meant!

The Municipal Stadium in Philadelphia (now John F. Kennedy Stadium) is an archaic sort of place. It's a horseshoe, but the tilt of the stadium is very shallow, going back at a low level from the playing field. It is far from ideal as a viewing point, and a further disadvantage of the design—demonstrated in the superlative this day—is that it invites the wind to whistle in. There was plenty of that in Philadelphia that cold, cold afternoon.

The Alabama team, dressed in white jerseys, stood shivering along the sidelines. One could literally see the knocking knees of Duff Morrison in the Bama secondary. Penn State continuously swept down the field, only to be held by a couple of Tide defensive gems on each thrust to fend off what seemed to be at any minute turning into a Nittany blue tidal wave. The only score of the game came just before halftime. Penn State faked a field goal, pitching the ball to halfback Roger Kochman, who went around Alabama's end. (Sadly, Kochman, who was a fine runner, was crippled for life sev-

eral years thereafter with one of the most severe knee injuries ever recorded in pro football.)

While everyone was disappointed to lose, the disappointment was overcome to some extent by the opportunity to leave that outdoor refrigerator and find some degree of warmth, which we did at the nearest bar on the way back to downtown Philadelphia.

We flew home with some members of the Alabama team (including Jim Blevins and Scooter Dyess), who did some sightseeing in the East following the game.

It was on this bowl trip that Coach Bryant, with his unerring instinct for something offbeat to get publicity for his team, used the chair drills. The starting lineup was seated in chairs, offense facing defense. A coach stood behind the defense and called out the play, at which point the members of the offense pointed to their assigned block or route. This got big play in the New York newspapers.

There is a post script to the Perry, deBuys and Morrows story. When they returned to their fancy limousine and their Cary Cadillac driver, they jumped in, turned the heater full blast and the driver headed out. Harry deBuys was the first to notice they seemed to be leaving Philadelphia on a different route than the one they came in on and asked the driver if he was sure where he was going. In monosyllables, the driver assured him they were New York-bound. deBuys continued to keep an eye on the road and was more and more doubtful of the driver's perspicacity. At length, Harry saw through his window a sign: Wilmington, Delaware, 8 Miles.

"Pull over and stop the car!" he screamed. The driver pulled off to the side of the New Jersey turnpike, Saturday night traffic whizzing by. Harry confronted the driver and only then realized they were being chauffeured by a drunk. "Out!," he cried. The driver stumbled and fell out of the car and made his way to the short retaining fence alongside the turnpike. He sat there in the cold, his eyes crossed in near oblivion. An inspection of the trunk revealed that not one, but two, bottles of Black Jack had apparently been consumed. They were thankful that the driver had been able at least to find the New Jersey turnpike, but not so grateful as to include him on the remainder of the roundabout trip. They left him there in the chill of the night. Harry drove back to New York. Whatever became of the driver is not known, but if he expired there on

the side of the road, at least he had a smile on his face.

The foursome got back to the Regency, managed to get Mr. Cary's home telephone number, and told him in no uncertain terms what they thought of his driver, his car, his company, and, doubtless, his ancestry.

FIRST QUARTER BREAK

We were in transit to a game in Athens some years ago and stopped in Atlanta Friday night. We were going to get a good meal, a good night's sleep, and then drive over to Athens early the next morning. In glancing through an Atlanta newspaper, one of us—I confess it may have been me—noticed an ad for a place called The Follies Buffet, which featured topless waitresses. This was a long time ago, and being from the country part of Alabama, it seemed important to us that we see what went on in saucy, sophisticated Atlanta.

The four of us—Bert Bank, Doug Layton, our tour director Grantland Rice, and I—headed for The Follies Buffet to have a drink before going to supper.

The Follies Buffet was a fairly large place, not far from the Atlanta Cabana. And while the waitresses were not completely topless, there was a great deal of epidermis to be viewed. They wore exceedingly short, short shorts, while up top they had nothing on but a diaphanous, gauzy piece of apparel that did virtually nothing to hide the young lady's bosom. Our waitress approached and inquired quite nasally, "What'll ya'll have?"

It was immediately apparent she was not from that year's crop of Atlanta debutantes. However, she was a nice looking lady, reasonably well-endowed, so all of us contemplated these things while deciding on what to drink. All of us except Bert, that is. It was fairly dark in The Follies Buffet and Bert has very, very poor eyesight, the result of his terrible experience as a prisoner of war on the Bataan Death March. We ordered drinks and she soon returned with them. We accepted her offer to run a tab, then I asked her, "Where are you from, honey?"

"You'd never have heard of it," she said, walking away.

During the course of enjoying our drinks we examined some of the other waitresses moving around—purely in the interest of research, of course. Bert was lamenting that he was unable to see

our young lady's charms. When she came back we explained his predicament and asked if she would be good enough to stand close to Bert. Being a good sport she moved right in front of Bert's face. He carries a small magnifying glass for reading, and he whipped it out. Our waitress bounced up and down for a moment, producing a definite and delightful jiggle. Bert beamed. "I see, I see!," he exclaimed.

The girl laughed and I said, once again, "Sure enough, where are you from, honey?"

"I guarantee you haven't heard of it," she answered.

"I'll bet you're from Chickamauga," I guessed, merely to keep her talking (the by-product of which was to keep her in view).

She looked at me in some surprise and said, "You're not far from right. I'm from Sylacauga, Alabama."

One of Sylacauga's most famous sons is Dazzling Doug Layton, of course, so we were stunned to get this report.

"Are you really from Sylacauga?," I asked, feeling sure this conversation was definitely headed somewhere. And Doug asked, "Do you know any Laytons?" She reeled off the names of several Laytons, including a couple of Doug's brothers and cousins.

"Young lady," I said, "this man is also from Sylacauga." She looked at Doug with surprise, then she and Doug said simultaneously, "I went to B.B. Comer High School." Doug went on to prove his being from Sylacauga by naming people, places and things that only a native could know. Doug knew her uncle, which caused her some mild degree of embarrassment. She told us she was married and her husband also worked the night shift and went to junior college. There was an awkward pause in the conversation. Then, in a gesture none of us will ever forget, she folded her arms carefully across her breasts and asked, "So who else do you know in Sylacauga?" For the rest of the weekend our battlecry was "Who else do you know in Sylacauga?"

PLAY-BY-PLAY ACTION: 1960

Alabama opened the 1960 season in the first college football game nationally-televised by ABC. (Bama, of course, has gone on to be the most-televised college football team.) The opposition was Georgia and Fran Tarkenton. Fran put on a great show, but in a losing cause as Bobby Skelton, Billy Richardson, and a couple of newcomers, Pat Trammell and Mike Fracchia, dominated everything. The Tide took a surprisingly easy 21-6 victory in Birmingham.

The next week Bama had a real off night in New Orleans. A friend of mine in attendance, J.O. Screven, also had an off night. J.O. was having some gut trouble, either due to libations or rich New Orleans food, so he was somewhat restrained in his enthusiasm, never sure when his stomach would reject his mind's desires, one way or another. It was a very exciting game. Later a mutual friend, Rod Martin, reported that towards the end of the game "Everyone was throwing toilet paper except J.O. He was catching it."

Bama was lucky not to lose to Tulane, but also unlucky not to win. The Tide fought from behind with Pat Trammell making one of the greatest two-yard runs I have ever seen. It was fourth down, and I think it would have taken no less than Rommel's Africa Corps to knock him down. It seemed as if every man in a green shirt had a shot at him, but Pat got it into the end zone to tie the game at 6-6. Then, heartbreakingly, we missed the extra point.

We still had one more chance. Alabama recovered the onside kick and Pat just barely missed a long pass into the end zone.

We beat Vandy, then came another ill-fated trip to Knoxville. Everything happened to Alabama. A kick was blocked, a pitchout intercepted, and, once again, the better team lost. Tennessee took

a 20-7 win. Trammell was out of the game, and Buddy Wesley suffered a severe head injury, to a degree there was genuine concern at the time about his physical well-being.

Bama bounced back with a 7-0 victory over Mississippi State in a very hard-hitting football game. This game is memorable primarily because it was the first outstanding game by a young sophomore linebacker, LeeRoy Jordan. It was an augury for the rest of his career.

Any recollection of outstanding, memorable games of the Bryant era would be a long one, and I can imagine no such list failing to include the 1960 Georgia Tech game in Atlanta November 12. This is particularly so for me.

Alabama was using Trammell as the primary quarterback with Skelton his backup man. Bobby was a great athlete, but had erratic tendencies. The Tide had fallen behind 15-0 in the first half at Tech, and Bryant wanted to get a spark going. He inserted Skelton into the lineup at quarterback and Bobby promptly fouled up, an interception I believe. When he came to the sidelines we noticed Coach Bryant putting his arm around Skelton's shoulders. Later Bryant would confess that he wasn't being fatherly; he was trying to strangle Skelton. And he was also telling Bobby that when he took off that red shirt at the end of the game he was taking it off for the last time, that he was through at Alabama.

Bama was not having a good day, but the Tide managed to get a couple of touchdowns on the board and the defense came to life and finally the Tide had the football inside its own 15 with two minutes to play trailing 15-13. On the first play of the final drive Trammell was injured and had to be removed from the game.

Maury, like all of us, was caught up in the excitement and drama of the comeback. With this critical turn of events, Trammell going out and Skelton coming back in, Maury said, "And that puts the last nail in Alabama's coffin." It so happens that a lot of people from St. Clair County, Bobby's home county, didn't see things just the way Maury did with their hero coming back in to quarterback the Tide. And Skelton, like the great competitive athlete he was, rose to the occasion. The march began. Three times the clock was stopped to measure the gain for first downs, and all had just made it. With 40 seconds remaining Skelton found Butch Wilson and hit him with a pass at the 15- or 16-yard line in Tech territory. Tech sympathizers

would note later that Butch had run so far out of bounds before coming back to catch the pass (illegal) that he could have sold a couple of Coca-Colas in the stands.

Nevertheless, with the clock running down Bama had gotten into position to win the game with a field goal. The Tide kicking situation that day was confusing. The regular man for kickoffs, field goals and extra points was Alabama's fine tight end Tommy Brooker (who later on in pro football would kick a field goal to end the longest game in history). Tommy, who would later help coach the kickers for Coach Bryant, was hurt this particular day and had not played against Tech.

The backup kicker was Richard O'Dell of Lincoln (not far from Skelton's Pell City hometown) and "Digger," as he was known, and Tommy had both warmed up in kicking before the game. Maury and I had made notice before the game that Tommy was in uniform, but was not wearing shoulder pads and was definitely out. However, he did appear to be kicking well. O'Dell's kicks were also good, but we felt if Alabama had to kick a field goal to win, Brooker was the key.

With a few seconds to play Skelton was trying to hurry his team into position, Tech was being leisurely hoping the clock would run out, and the officials were trying to get things under way. In this bedlam a solitary figure was trotting onto the field from the Alabama sidelines, kicking tee in hand. Reflexively, Maury said Brooker was coming in to kick the field goal. I concurred.

Skelton managed to calm everyone down, got the ball snapped, placed it down and the kicker advanced the ball. It soared high, but resembled more a dying swan than a firm, sharp kick. I felt the ball would be good if it could just get to the goalposts. I watched the two officials under the crossbar and when one raised his hands indicating a success and an Alabama victory, I shouted "It's good!" Maury shouted, "Alabama wins, 16-15!" There was no time remaining.

The radio booth in Grant Field in those days had some very steep steps behind the announcing station. Bert Bank was poised on these steps behind me. With our announcement of the victory, Bert—in his excitement—misstepped and came tumbling down on me. My microphone crashed to the floor and all my notes and commercials went floating out into the cool Georgia air.

It was an incredible comeback in those days of defensive football. Maury and I described the delirium on the Alabama sidelines and

went into paroxysms of praise for Brooker. "Demoplis's Tommy Brooker kicks his way into Tide immortality with a 33-yard field goal to give Alabama a stirring victory in one of the most exciting games ever played on Grant Field. Tommy Brooker, the man of the hour for all Alabama fans." It was Brooker, Brooker, Brooker.

In our excitement and frenzy we finished the broadcast, wiped our brow, and walked down the concrete steps of ancient, fabled Grant Field. As the heat of excitement began to be replaced by the warm glow of success, and as I replayed the glory in my mind's eye, suddenly it occurred to me that the man who had kicked the field goal was wearing shoulder pads. The difference between a player wearing pads and a player not wearing pads is impossible to miss. A sick, sinking sensation came over me.

Maury had a private flight and was already in a cab headed for the Atlanta airport, but I was spending the night in Atlanta and so was headed to join the Bama celebrants outside the Tide dressing room. I approached the whooping, hollering crowd and saw a friend of mine, Bill Pritchard, on the outer fringe. Feeling worse and worse I went up to Bill and grabbed his arm. "Brother," I asked, "who kicked the field goal."

"O'Dell!," he cried exuberantly.

"Oh, hell," I said despondently.

The good people of central Alabama—Talladega, Pell City, Lincoln, Springville—had justifiably bitter feelings towards me and Maury following that performance. And did we ever hear from them! There was even a petition against Maury from Pell City. After all, it had been Pell City's Skelton who had engineered the winning drive and Lincoln's O'Dell who had dug the grave for the Yellow Jackets and we had slurred one, ignored the other. Maury told me later he heard the report as he was flying back to Alabama and almost wished the plane would crash.

I also heard later that O'Dell's father knew only what he had heard on the Alabama broadcast when he called Digger that night and told his son, "I'm sure glad it wasn't you that had to try that field goal."

TIMEOUT

We had gone to Atlanta with two other couples and had lived it up the night before the game. After we had regrouped at the dressing room and cheered the Tide onto their buses for the airport, we walked slowly along with the crowd back to the motel. All of us were sincerely overcome with emotion at the excitement of the game.

We all needed a drink—at least one—to recover from the day, but our Friday night pregame bracers had exhausted our mixer supply. I volunteered to make a run and walked a couple of blocks until I came to a drugstore in a rather seedy section of Atlanta. The walk in the fast-falling November night calmed me; in fact, I began to have a real sense of depression, that I did not have a right to be so happy when all around me was evidence of sadness and despair. I saw a teenaged newsboy heading out the door of the drugstore with a stack of newspapers. He wore a heavy brace on a crippled leg.

"Paper, mister?" he said to me. I took a paper, gave him a ten dollar bill, and turned away so he couldn't see my tears. I got the mixers and got the hell back to the motel as fast as I could.

Coach Bryant had scheduled Tampa as a warmup prior to the Auburn game. The Tampa athletics director must have seen the game as a way to make a big paycheck, and in order to cut expenses had bused his team to Tuscaloosa on Friday. B.W. Whittington, at the time the Alabama ticket man, reported the Tampa players were holloweyed. "John," he said, shaking his head ruefully, "I'm not sure they can go the distance."

They did, but Alabama coasted to a 34-6 victory.

That set the stage for a truly great Alabama-Auburn game in the classic defensive mold that both Coach Bryant and Auburn Coach Shug Jordan adored. Auburn's Ed Dyas was a fine player and great field goal kicker, and it was Alabama's game plan not to let Auburn inside the 35-yard line. The Tide was successful. Auburn's only meaningful penetration into Bama territory came on the final play of the first half.

On the other side of the coin, Alabama did not threaten either. Finally, Mike Fracchia put the Tide within field goal range. He made a first down on a fourth and one call, but the Tide was penalized. Again Fracchia got the call, and again he delivered. Now Bama was close enough and Brooker delivered. The Tide's 3-0 victory earned Alabama a second straight bowl bid, to the Bluebonnett Bowl in Houston.

One of Coach Bryant's best friends was Michigan State's Duffy Daugherty. In one of their many conversations Duffy noted that so many teams had white helmets, he thought it would be an advantage in the passing game to have colored helmets. Bama's performance against Texas in the Bluebonnet Bowl marked the Tide's change from the white helmets with red stripes to the now-familiar and famed "red hats" with white stripes.

The game against Texas also marked the first of many bowl games against the Longhorns in which officials' rulings were instrumental in Alabama's lack of success. One of the worst calls in the history of football was Bobby Skelton being ruled down short of the goalline. Bobby didn't just break the imaginary plane; he went a couple of yards into touchdown territory. The Southwest Conference official who ruled him short was the same one who would be involved in an Orange Bowl game four years later in which two highly-controversial calls went against Bama. We heard later he was a good friend of a former Auburn star, and his bowl game per-

formances must certainly have endeared him to the ex-Tiger.

An unmarried friend of mine from New Orleans and three of his socialite friends made the trip to Houston for the game. All four of them had very attractive ladies accompanying them. It turned out that the three friends were all married (and these were not their wives); however, they were not so concerned about their wives finding out about the trip to Houston with these young women as they were their mistresses might get wind of it!

Now that's what I call sports.



Receiving the award as Alabama's Sportscaster of the Year from North Carolina Governor Terry Sanford and Miss North Carolina at Salisbury in 1961 (and repeating in 1964) was an honor.

TIMEOUT

Recently I saw a note about the late Jim Tatum, a great coach and very nice guy who died far, far before his time. Jim was a handsome man, big, with a shock of coal, black hair. He's the coach who started Oklahoma's dynasty and left it in the capable hands of Bud Wilkinson when he left to go to the University of Maryland. And whom did Tatum replace? One P.W. Bryant, who had set out for the blue grasses of Kentucky.

Tatum was upset by Alabama at Mobile in 1952, but for the return engagement at College Park the next year he had a national championship outfit waiting and they shellacked us, 21-0. A halfback from Hackensack, New Jersey, named Chet Hanulak ran 81 yards for a touchdown. Tom Kinney, a portly—very portly—sports editor from Columbus, Georgia, is still remembered for his impromptu song and dance performance of his original number, "Hanulak from Hackensack." A Gene Kelly he wasn't, but his performance (and its favorable reception by his fellow journalists) was probably aided by the fact that the Maryland press box back then featured not only a standing rib roast and other comestibles, but also free booze! It was the only press box (other than a few bowl games) where I had seen this. When we went back there in 1974 the practice had been discontinued.

To offer free whiskey to the ink-stained wretches and golden-larynxed warblers of the fourth estate is rather like offering to supply the city dog pound with meat. The demand is endless.

The pregame meal in the press box is a valuable fringe benefit because the writers and broadcast people stuff their gullets with as much as they can hold and are not remiss in toting away anything handy. Preferably, but not necessarily, wrapped. Then they turn in a steak dinner on the expense account and try to survive for another week.

Press box fare rarely varies, yet almost each has a unique feature.

Alabama's press box catering service is handled by Al Topazi, nicknamed "the Toots Shor of the Birmingham News building" years ago by the late Benny Marshall. Al, a most pleasant fellow, ran the cafe there for many, many years. Since the News has never

won any awards from Sigma Delta Chi for paying high salaries to their indentured servants (indeed, what newspaper has?), Al doubtless rendered valuable service with such things as credit and helping people to get bets down.

Naturally, Coke and Golden Flake products were a staple of the Alabama press box, but Al's plat du jour is a foot-long hot dog with assorted condiments and a fiery concoction of a sauce. Al says this recipe has been in his family for years and years; he actually sold the formula to a hot dog chain. It is arguably the best thing ever to happen to the DiGel and Rolaid business since the cucumber. Presumably this sauce was used by preceding generations of Topazis to ward off invading Huns; or perhaps as an antidote to the plague and pestilence that ravaged Europe in the Middle Ages.

For those with weakened gastric equipment, Al will fix you up with a sandwich (hamburger, steak, delicatessen quality meat, and/or cheese), great quantities of peanuts, fried chicken with all the trimmings, or, if you play your cards right, the finest sausage and biscuit this side of Grandmother's.

My broadcasting associate, the estimable Doug Layton, and I are obviously and admittedly Alabama fans; and we got as tight and as tense as all Tide nuts do prior to a game. You've heard of getting a Game Face on? Doug does it one better: he gets a Game Lower Intestine Tract on. When we are the visiting team, some lucky druggist is often going to make a major Kaopectate sale. He has a vast appetite, and despite any pregame jitters, a good digestion. In fact, believe it or not, he generally out-eats me! I think he has figured out a way to eat and have me gain the weight.

Doug also must have masochistic tendencies. I have seen him at Legion Field munching a foot long well-lathered in Topazi sauce, groaning and writhing in some sort of gastronomic ecstasy.

At many fields, fried chicken is the main course and after awhile press row is covered in a filmy sheen of grease and bones are ankle deep on the floor.

Auburn's press box was distinguished for several years by regular size hot dogs which, although they were cold, were usually tasteless also. But with the advent of the Buddy Davidson, then David Housel, years, two ladies from Auburn took over and serve a delightful repast of meat, vegetable, potato, salad and dessert. In

fact, Auburn includes its press box menu in its weekly releases prior to a home game!

For those press members who cover the Masters golf tournament each year, "Gargantua," a private security man whose real name is unknown, is legend as guard of the press tent. He is also on duty in the press box at Grant Field, and woe be to anyone who might consider disregarding the regular press box admonition that no food is to be taken from the press box.

Around the Southeastern Conference each press box has its own flavor. Although Tennessee's main course of hot dogs is undistinguished, homemade cookies are every-other-year delights.

When Fran Curci was head football coach at Kentucky, the press box fare was all homemade and all delicious. Wives of the assistant coaches prepared a feast.

LSU sometimes has nothing-out-of-the-ordinary victuals, but occasionally has a treat of Louisiana specialties—crawfish, oysters, shrimp, gumbo, etc.

A few schools have an additional feature to the press passes they issue, a ticket good for one meal. Vanderbilt, Ole Miss and Mississippi State want to make sure that no one gets more than one lunch, usually a box of Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Around the country some press box meals that stand out were the hamburgers, charbroiled right before you, at Southern Cal, and the fancy buffet befitting the wealth of Rice.

Perhaps some day members of the press will vote a Top Ten of press box feeders. That would be a poll they could really get their teeth into!

1961

Prior to the 1961 season, we all felt Alabama would have a great football team. I went to the Masters golf tournament that spring and ran into Bob Ford, a young coach who had been on Coach Bryant's staff, but had gone on to another school. He asked me how things were in Tuscaloosa and I told him that I thought spring training had gone well. "John," he said, "Alabama is going to be great. I don't think everybody realizes what a tremendous football team they are going to have over there."

Naturally, this added to my excitement and to that of my friends, to whom I spread these wonderful tidings as quickly as I could.

I had been away from the Bryant television show the previous year because it had been taken over by Frank Taylor, a competitor of the Luckie & Forney agency where I worked. However, Robert "Preacher" Franklin of the Coca-Cola Company was a good friend of mine and he was bound and determined to get me back on. He used as the excuse that Maury Farrell had some loose connection with Edward Norton, who was the major stockholder in RC Cola. Preacher told Coach Bryant I would be taking Maury's place as his sideman on the Coke and Golden Flake-sponsored show.

Coach Bryant never failed to let a man know exactly where he stood—and why. At Coach's summer outing at Lake Martin, Maury—who was and is a good friend of mine—and I were talking down by the dock. Coach Bryant walked by and asked if we had a moment. We followed him over to a private part of his lot. "I want both of you to know this," he began. "Maury, I'm real disappointed you're not going to be doing the show with me. I've been comfortable with you and I think you've done a good job. However, if you've got a connection with RC I can see how Coke feels about that." That settled, he turned to me. "John, I don't have anything against you doing the show, but I wanted you to know that I'm disappointed Maury will not be there. I did not want any misunder-

standing on this, and I did not want Maury to feel I had asked for a change." We both said we completely understood and that we were both grateful to still be doing the radio broadcasts of the games together.

Early in September, before the first game, I was in a suburban liquor store when I bumped into Julian Lackey, a friend of mine and a very close friend of Coach Bryant's. "John," he said, "take a look out there in my car." I glanced out and saw a young man wearing a porkpie hat, sporting a toothpick from one corner of his mouth. "That," said Julian proudly, "is Joe Namath (he mispronounced his name, Ne-MATH), and we just got him from Pennsylvania. The Coach thinks he can be a great one." History proved that to be almost an understatement.

So there were significant events—Bob Ford's inside information on what to expect, my new role with the television show, and the arrival of Joe Namath—before the 1961 season even got under way.

The opener that year was against Georgia in Athens on a cruelly-hot day. People were dropping like flies. I had driven to the game



Another Bryant, singer Anita, joined us on a 1964 edition of "The Bear Bryant Show."

with a friend of mine, Leroy Whidby. Athens is perhaps the most ill-designed town (from a road standpoint) in the Southeastern Conference for the kinds of crowds they have at football games. A two-lane road accomodates most of the traffic for miles and miles. Boil-overs on cars were the order of the day. It looked like the retreat from Moscow. In addition to the many cars merely overheated, a few had even burned up.

The Alabama team buses pulled up to the stadium as I was ready to go in. I watched Pat Trammell lead the Tide players off the buses. A poised, confident, superbly-conditioned young man, Pat was in full charge of himself. Georgia students and fans were also waiting and as Pat and his teammates threaded their way through them they were subjected to a barrage of jibes. If they were trying to bother Pat, they were just wasting their time. Pat was a senior, ready to lead Bama to gridiron heights.

Leroy had sipped a bit of the hair of the dog on the way from Atlanta, where we had partied the night before, earning Leroy a massive hangover and bad case of the shakes to begin game Saturday. I was concerned about him and asked his ticket location. Sanford Stadium is one of the nation's most beautiful, scenic in every respect including the famous hedges. At that time the stadium was not enclosed and a large number of fans viewed the game from an end zone hillside. During the course of the game I noticed a large number of people there stretched out, having succumbed to the heat. During the game I heard the public address announcer call for a doctor to go to the section where Leroy was sitting and I was confident it must be for my friend. However, hardy soul that he was, it wasn't.

It was a great performance by Alabama, a 32-7 victory with Mike Fracchia getting a couple of touchdowns. Alabama's promise appeared to be real.

Driving back to Atlanta, Leroy reported that a lady sitting in front of him in a red wool suit stood up in the middle of the second quarter and announced loudly, "I was a fool to wear this suit on a red hot day, but I'm not going to be a fool and keep it on." With that she peeled off the jacket top and sat there in her bra and slip for the rest of the game. Leroy and I agreed that was the kind of fan—loyal, dedicated, and impervious to custom—that Alabama needed!

The next day I was scheduled to do the first show with Coach

Bryant. I was concerned about it for a number of reasons, not the least of which was that I had been spotted in Atlanta Friday night before the game with a young lady. Those spotting me included my friends, but more importantly some friends of my wife. It was innocent enough because it involved some radio jingle singing, but I could not very well explain that through the course of the evening. Therefore, I was concerned about (a) the show, (b) what sort of reports might have gotten back to Birmingham, and (c) that I was working for a competitor, although Frank Taylor was, like me, a great fan of Alabama.

It was an uneasy afternoon, but somehow we got through it and I threw myself on the mercy of my wife. She was, God bless her, completely understanding.

After the auspicious start, Alabama played a sloppy game and was lucky to beat Tulane, 9-0, the next week in Mobile.

Reports from the campus prior to the third game, against Vanderbilt, were that Coach Bryant and his staff had unfurled the lash again and really worked the Tide. Results certainly indicated some such. On the first play that Saturday night in Nashville Mike Fracchia took a handoff, reversed into a bevy of potential Commodore tacklers like a spinning, maddened dervish, and broke out en route to a 66-yard touchdown dash. Alabama went on to defeat the Commodores, 35-6. The Tide was on its way.

North Carolina State was the next opponent. The Wolfpack quarterback was Roman Gabriel, who became a star quarterback in the pros, and he had a pretty good afternoon against the Tide. Late in the game Bama led 19-7, no more than a minute or two to play. Eddie Versprille, a young sophomore from Virginia, was in at full-back. (Mike Fracchia, playing linebacker then in that era of modified one platoon football, had been hurt earlier in a goalline stand effort. The next day, watching the film at the TV studio, Coach Bryant asked us to re-show the play on which Mike got hurt. One leg had been caught under him as he was blocked and it was fortunate the injury wasn't worse. Several of us onlookers grimaced as we saw Mike go awkwardly backwards to the ground. "Hell," Bryant growled, "if he had been charging forward like he was supposed to it wouldn't have happened." What a man!)

Naturally, Eddie wanted to look good with this playing opportunity. He took a handoff, plunged into the center of the line, and

fought to break free and keep his balance.

The betting line on the game favored Alabama by 15 or 16 points, so it looked as though Tide backers would lose. They (We!) reckoned without Versprille's efforts.

He kept clawing and scratching until finally he was in the secondary, veered to his left, and completed a fantastic 50-yard touchdown run. Anyone curious about the level of betting on Alabama football games should have been there that day. The game had already been won, but Versprille's run to win the line was greeted with the most thunderous, cheering roar of the entire day—students, alums, concession sellers, everyone—they all seemed to have some sort of action on the game. As one well-heeled and influential Tide backer put it, "I don't see how Versprille ran so fast carrying all that money."

I saw Eddie some 20 years later and asked if he remembered that run. There were traces of tears in his eyes as he told me, "I'll never forget it." Neither will a lot of Tide backers . . . and their bookies.

Tennessee in Birmingham was next and the Vols boasted a 3-0 record over the returned Messiah, Bryant. Perhaps in desperation, Bryant had turned the game over to Howard Schnellenberger, who had just joined the Alabama staff. Tennessee had an excellent placekicker. Bryant, in his anxiety, decided at the last moment to get Billy Richardson ready as a human projectile in case he was needed to block a Tennessee field goal try. To this end, at the Alabama team meal at the Bankhead Hotel, Bryant ordered the tables moved out and the Tide players went through a drill to see if a couple of Bama linemen could take Billy and flip him so he could block the kick. Billy said later the battering he took that morning with his teammates tossing him to the dining room floor were the hardest licks he took all day.

Bryant's concern was prescient as the Vols started off with a 50-plus yard field goal and a 3-0 lead. However, that was it for the Orange and White as Bama roared to a 34-3 victory. Coach Bryant embraced Schnellenberger and lifted him to his shoulders for a victory ride to the center of the field.

TIMEOUT

Two of Coach Bryant's "embraces" I'll always remember involved my mother and my youngest daughter, Pride. The Bryants had just come back to Tuscaloosa and my mother was working in a small gift store there. Frank and Tommye Rose had a function at the President's Mansion and were thoughtful enough to include her, since she was the sister of an earlier University president, Dr. Richard C. Foster. She approached Coach and Mary Harmon and identified herself. Paul Bryant hadn't seen her in at least 20 years. He grabbed her and hugged her to him. "Kathleen," he said fervently, "you're just as pretty as you were when I was in school here." Mother never forgot. Neither have I.

I was in the Stafford Hotel with my wife, Pride, and little Pride, prior to my brother's wedding. We were waiting for the elevator. The doors opened and out walked Coach Bryant. Little Pride, who was only four, just beamed. (She had seen her old man and the great man on television together.) She stretched her arms up to him. "I love you," she said. Quickly, he scooped her up. "And, Sugar, I love you, too," he said.

Oh, yes. There was one other embrace I remember. It was at one of the Lake Martin gatherings. For some time I had felt that the numerals on the Alabama road jerseys were small and difficult for fans (and radio announcers) to read from high in the stands. We were standing on a pier, just Coach and I, for a moment and I was bold enough to say I thought it would be a good idea to put larger numbers on the jerseys. Coach put an arm around my shoulders and began to squeeze my neck. It felt something like a python with bones. "Ol' buddy," he said slowly, "you ought to know 'em with no numbers at all."

So much for my suggestion.

The Georgia Tech game of that 1961 season was one of the most stirring ones in a long string of great football games between the two schools. Alabama entered the game ranked second in the nation, behind Texas which was playing a heavy underdog, TCU.

It was a taut, tense game. Alabama had a 3-0 lead, but Georgia Tech had a fine offense and had threatened throughout the day. Late in the game came the public address announcement that TCU had upset Texas, 6-0. A tremendous roar went up. Everyone realized Bama had a chance to take over the number one spot in the national rankings.

Shortly thereafter, Trammell flipped the ball back to Fracchia around right end. Butch Wilson made a great leveling block on a Tech linebacker, and Mike turned and sailed into the end zone. (The next day as we previewed the film for his television show, Coach Bryant said, almost to himself, as he watched the play, "Gentlemen, gentlemen, there is no substitute for speed.") The 10-0 score held up. Bama was number one!

Bama glee was later tempered by revelation of the unfortunate incident involving Darwin Holt and Chick Graning. I was not even aware it had happened during the game. Perhaps because Paul Bryant didn't expect life to be easy, when times were hard he was able to overcome. The situation was a Tech punt. Graning, running down to cover the kick, saw the Tide receiver signal for a fair catch. Holt, back to block for the return, had his back to his teammate and did not know a fair catch had been called. Graning relaxed and Holt teed off on him, Darwin's elbow breaking Graning's jaw. To put it mildly it was a sad, unfortunate occurrence, and the culpability rested where it should: on Darwin's shoulders. However, the Atlanta media chose to blow the matter way out of proportion; not to get at Darwin Holt, of course, but to take some shots at Bryant, who was moving Southern football dominance west, from Atlanta and Knoxville to Tuscaloosa.

Sunday morning as we previewed the film, Bryant (who was one of the few who already knew about Graning's broken jaw), had some nice things to say about Tech Coach Bobby Dodd. As we watched Tech run back a third straight kickoff to midfield, Bryant said, very relaxed, "I've got to get Bobby to tell me how he does that." There was no hint in his demeanor that anything was astir.

Certainly Darwin Holt was an intense athlete who loved contact,

but he was not a dirty player. Off the field he was the mildest sort of gentleman. (Today he is an insurance executive and a prime mover in an organization called The First And Ten Club, which was begun at Coach Bryant's request. The group of former Tide athletes in virtually every career field counsels current Bama athletes in career opportunities.)

A Monday column in the Atlanta newspapers started the brouhaha, and by the end of the week Bryant and Holt were being portrayed as throwbacks to torturers of the Inquisition, with a touch of Gestapo pleasantries thrown in. Unquestionably the incident cast a pall on the national championship year. It was also probably the first turn of the wheels that would roll towards the demise of the *Saturday Evening Post* several years later.

In four short years Alabama had completely reversed its situation vis a vis Auburn and the Tide was reestablished as the dominant team in the state. The Tide's 34-0 victory over the Tigers that year was keyed by a blocked punt. One of Alabama's watch fob guards, Jimmy Wilson (the other was Jimmy Sharpe) blocked the punt, and then LeeRoy Jordan and Bill Battle pushed and nudged the ball into the end zone, where Battle fell on it for a touchdown. After the game I was standing outside the Alabama dressing room when Wilson came up to me. "Mr. Forney," he said, "would you make sure tomorrow that you and Coach know that 64 blocked that punt. I know LeeRoy will probably get credit." (Jordan was number 54, Wilson 64.) I promised Jimmy I would make certain that Chink Wilson would be the recipient of Coach Bryant's praise; and he was.

The show that Sunday was a very happy one because we were notified by wire that the MacArthur Bowl, awarded to the nation's top team as selected by the National Football Foundation and Hall of Fame, was going to Alabama. It was also almost certain—and would prove true—that the Associated Press and United Press International championships were headed to Tuscaloosa.

Coach Bryant's ever-present yellow legal pad often included one-word reminders to him to tell about someone who was ill, or note some old player he had seen after the game, and the like. This day he scrawled "Pat," and throughout the show made mention that he and Trammell would have to go to New York to accept the MacArthur Bowl. Bama players had been given time off between the Auburn game and bowl preparation and Coach wanted to make sure

he heard from Pat. With each reference to the MacArthur Bowl and the national championship, Coach Bryant added: "Now, Patricia, be sure and call me."

Just before signoff that day the crew wheeled a large, single-tiered white cake with crimson icing onto the set. It read: Alabama 1961 National Champions. We went over to cut it, and Coach Bryant grabbed my hand and shook it warmly.

I felt proud. Very proud.

The Tide completed its undefeated season with a close call game against the Arkansas Razorbacks in the Sugar Bowl, and the '61 team had earned its place in Alabama football history.



General Douglas MacArthur presented the 1961 MacArthur Bowl to Coach Bryant and Pat Trammell in recognition of Bama's national championship. I got several copies of the Associated Press photograph, had them autographed by The Coach and The General, and distributed them to a few close friends. Sadly, I never got Pat's autograph on this photo. I gave my last copy to Pat's widow, Bay.

TIMEOUT

I have made references to my betting on football, and it is certainly true that I have done that over the years. In the early days I bet more than I should have. I think for the natural gambler (and, Lord knows, many, many men and women are), there is something rather thrilling about having a number and being identified to a shadowy voice on the telephone as such and such a number. (In my own case my number for many years was 13—all too appropriate.)

In the early years it was hard to lose betting on Alabama, although the oddsmakers finally realized that Bryant was going to have a sensational career and adjusted the point spread accordingly.

There are a number of ways the bookmakers have worked out to relieve people of their money. One, of course, is the straight bet, where one puts up \$11 to win \$10 (or \$1,100 to win \$1,000, as the case may be) and bet the "line" on any specific given game. If Alabama is a three-point favorite (minus 3), and you bet on Alabama, Alabama must win the game by more than three points for you to win your bet. Alabama could lose, tie, or win by one or two points and you would lose. Alabama winning by three points as a three-point favorite is a "push," no bet. That 10 percent difference you put up is the vigorish, which goes to the bookie. (A bookmaker who is able to have all of his bets even—the same number of people betting both sides of the line—will automatically net a 10 percent profit and there is a belief that this is the goal of the bookies. However, in truth unless a game is getting heavily out of line, most don't try to lay off any of their bets, relying instead on the bettor to be misinformed and taking a bigger chunk.)

There are parlays, the ultimate sucker game. You can bet two games on the line and if you hit them both you receive a 13 to 5 payoff. Hit three games and the payoff is 6 to 1.

Then there are the "teasers," where you get additional points, plus or minus, depending on which side of the bet you take. For example, a two-game teaser gives you a six-point spread. If you want to bet say Alabama and Tennessee and Alabama's line is minus 7 and Tennessee's is plus 8, you would now have Alabama

minus 1 and Tennessee plus 14. A three-game teaser adds 10 points and a four-game teaser 12 points.

Back in the old days, when there was such emphasis on defense in the SEC, it was almost impossible to lose a 12-point teaser. For years Alabama played Georgia Tech and Auburn played Georgia on the same day. You could bet all four teams and win going away. The scores were always so close that 12 points each way usually would give you four wins.

A legitimate concern of the bettor is that in a raid on his bookie by local or federal authorities might result in the bettor's name turning up. A friend of mine asked his bookie one day, "Are your records edible?" "No," replied the bookie, "but they're damn sure flushable."

Another friend of mine, a dentist, called his bookie one day not knowing the FBI was camped in the bookie's parlor. My friend gave his number and his bet. The FBI man on the phone explained he was taking the calls for "George" that day, "so you'd better let me know who this is just to be on the safe side." Not wanting to have any problems, my dentist friend of course gave him his name. Subsequently he had the dubious pleasure of testifying at grand jury.

Fortunately, I have never had such an experience.

Unfortunately, I have never been able to deduct my losses!

One of the bookie crackdowns occurred in the middle of the 1961 season and gave me one of the best betting opportunities I will ever have. Mississippi State was to be Bama's homecoming opponent that year, and the initial Las Vegas line was set at 15 points, Alabama favored. However, word was out that a couple of local bookies were not answering their phones on Sunday prior to the pro games because there was some investigation going on. I called one bookie Monday morning with the same result—no answer. The second bookie answered. He said he had already moved the game to 16 because so many people were betting Alabama. Somewhat concerned about exposure, I decided not to bet with this second bookie, and I did not call him back. A friend of mine called me on Wednesday and said all the bookmakers were back in business, although several—including the one I ordinarily dealt with—had changed telephone numbers. He gave me the new number for my man.

I called him and for some inexplicable reason he had the

Alabama price at 15, where it had opened. I had heard other bookies had the game at 18, so reflexively I bet \$2,000 on Alabama minus 15. The moment I hung up from that call I hurriedly dialed the other bookie and told him I wanted to bet \$2,000 on Mississippi State plus 18. He said he couldn't let me have a \$2,000 bet at 18, that he would only take \$1,000, which obviously left me hanging out \$1,000. My next call was to my friend, Mr. Whidby. I told him not to ask any questions, just to call a bookie and bet me \$1,000 on Mississippi State plus 18. Leroy was an old customer of this particular bookie, and I knew he would not turn him down. "John, why?," he asked. "For goodness sakes, Lee, don't ask questions," I pleaded. "Just get me down for \$1,000 right now!" In a few minutes he called back. He had bet the \$1,000, but the bookie had moved it to 17.

At any rate I sat with Alabama minus 15 for \$2,000; Mississippi State plus 17 for \$1,000; and Mississippi State plus 18 for another \$1,000. If Alabama won by 17 or 18 points I would win two bets worth \$3,000, less \$100 vigorish. If Alabama won by 15 I would win two bets worth \$2,000, less \$200 vigorish. And if it should happen to fall at 16 I would win all three bets, \$4,000. The most I could possibly lose was the vigorish, a maximum of \$200.

Alabama homecoming was typically festive, but the game was played in a driving, torrential rain. The red and white bunting, parade floats and house decorations were all drooping and bedraggled by the time kickoff came Saturday afternoon. However, I was far from drooping and bedraggled—I was nervous as hell!

One of the scores I remember is Tommy Brooker blocking a Mississippi State field goal and catching it right against his stomach and running it down. I don't recall how the other scores occurred, but with a minute or so to go Bama had a 17-0 lead and the ball at State's 30-or-so-yardline. All the Tide had to do was kill the clock and I would win \$3,000—the \$2,000 on Alabama at minus 15 and the \$1,000 on State plus 18, and I would push the 17-point State bet for \$1,000. A lot of my friends sitting below us in the stands knew the bets I had on the game, that I had been fortunate enough to catch the bookies out of line, a once-in-a-very-blue-blue-moon occurrence.

Coach Bryant had substitutes in the game at this late point with Jack Hurlbut at quarterback. Hurlbut came to Alabama with a lot

of promise, which was never quite fulfilled. However, on this weekend he was quite good. Why, I will never know.

He ran a quarterback sneak, then a keeper to the left, getting knocked out of bounds at about the two-foot line. Suddenly Alabama was knocking at the door with only 20 seconds to play. On the next play Hurlbut handed to Dink Wall, who dived over the pile and into the end zone. Alabama won 24-0 and my \$3,000 profit had turned into a \$200 loss. I could see people all over the stands craning their necks to see if I was going to jump out of the booth and end it all. I confess it was a tempting thought.

I'm sure that game contributed to my chronic high blood pressure. I ran into Jack Hurlbut about five years ago. He now lives in Forney, Texas!

1962

Alabama entered the 1962 season number one in both AP and UPI polls despite the fact the Tide was going with an untested sophomore quarterback in place of the great and graduated Pat Trammell. The sophomore's name was Joe Namath.

Alabama opened against Georgia in Birmingham and early in the game Namath hit Richard Williamson on a long down-and-out for the first of his many Alabama touchdown passes. The floodgates were open. Alabama gave Georgia a 35-0 thumping. The only people who took a worse beating than Georgia that night would feel the sting later—the owners of *The Saturday Evening Post*.

Namath, perhaps 19 years old at the time, was determined to show his cool after that first touchdown pass. He loped off the field in what was to become that familiar Namath shuffle. However, when he reached the bench and his teammates he leaped into the air with great exuberance and was mobbed by a group of Southerners, welcoming the Beaver Falls bomber with open arms.

The Bryant-Wally Butts vs. *Saturday Evening Post* affair has been so well-chronicled I will touch on it only briefly. In the winter of 1963 rumors kept cropping up of a major expose' regarding scandal in college football. *Sports Illustrated* alluded to it in veiled terms. Finally *The Saturday Evening Post* came out with a story that former Georgia Coach Wally Butts, now athletics director, had talked with Bryant by long distance (true, since Bryant was also athletics director and since the two were friends), and that Butts had given Bryant all of Georgia's "secrets." This was patently absurd and judged so in Federal Court. The only "secret," anyone who watched the game could attest, was that Alabama had a very fine football team and Georgia a very poor one. Namath and company probably could have doubled that 35-0 score. Bryant and Alabama needed inside information to beat Georgia that year about as much as Dolly Parton needs foam rubber.

A man purported to have overheard the conversation through a crossed telephone line and was able to generate interest in his claims from a lot of smart people who should have known better. When the story broke, Bryant decided to go on television with a rebuttal. I was out of town on business, but we talked by phone about his statement. I was unable to be on the show, but in retrospect I think that was best. The closeups of his coldly angry face and the slow-paced, measured tone of his voice were unforgettable as he denounced the story as a lie.

Benny Marshall of the *Birmingham News* covered the trial in Atlanta. He told me later that Bryant on the witness stand was the embodiment of barely-controlled fury, as if it were a real effort for him not to get off the witness stand and tear his accusers apart by hand. He said the malevolence in every aspect of him, his absolute conviction he had been wronged beyond repair, hypnotized the entire courtroom. After that, Benny said, it was all over but for how much he would collect.

Although the episode probably had its genesis in Atlanta media circles, it was *The Saturday Evening Post* that absorbed the loss. The magazine begun by Ben Franklin was ended by Paul Bryant. Although the publication probably faced eventual extinction at the hands of TV iconoscopes, the suit costs and unfavorable publicity hastened its demise after many score years as a magazine titan. Bryant and Butts received large awards, Bryant getting \$300,000 in a settlement. A group of us were talking about that one day and an attorney friend, Ed Hardin, noted those were tax free dollars, net to Bryant. We were all quiet, thinking about how it would be to have 300 big ones.

"What would you do with three hundred thousand in cash?" someone wondered. "Simple," said Hardin. "I'd sit down and pay bills as far as it would go."

Alabama was awesome in its second game of 1962, a 44-6 romp over Tulane. Also awesome was the postgame party put on by Billy Monteleone and Bobby Reich in the Monteleone Suite at the Monteleone Hotel. Pride and I partied until the wee hours, returning to our room about 6 a.m. Because I had to catch an early plane in order to do the television show, I left a wakeup call for 6:45. The operator verified that; such is life in New Orleans that a 45-minute night's sleep did not surprise her. The call came at 6:45. I struggled up,

sat on the side of the bed, and promptly went to sleep. Pride got me up and I managed to make it to the lobby, where I checked out, then sat down while waiting for a limousine and fell asleep again. Pride aroused me once again to get me into the car, and I grabbed another 40 winks en route to the airport. At the terminal it took both Pride and the driver to get me up and aboard the airship where, thankfully, I was able to get about two hours sleep before arriving in Birmingham and going to the station for the show.

The next week we were witness to one of the most extraordinary plays I have seen in college football. Playing against Vanderbilt, the Tide was going for a two-point conversion. Namath rolled to his left, intending to run the ball, I believe. However, he was hemmed in. He spotted a receiver barely over the goalline just as a wave of Vandy defenders swarmed him. Namath somehow managed to shift the ball from his left hand to his right, and as he was being ridden down flipped it backhanded to his receiver. The next day at the TV station the first thing Bryant said was "Did you get a picture of that kid?" and he flipped his arm backwards somewhat as Namath had done. I told him we had excellent slow motion of this. "One of the damndest plays I've ever seen," said the Coach.

Miami and George Mira furnished the opposition for homecoming. I had gotten a sidelines pass that day for James Watson, a fine black man who had worked for the agency for a number of years. James proudly went and watched the game from the little slope at the northwest corner of Denny Stadium. I had the glasses on James as the Alabama team ran onto the field right beside him and he was positively beaming at being so close to the Crimson Tide. Coach Bryant was anything but beaming at halftime. Mira opened up having a great day. The Tide was run up, down and sideways trying to get him and at the half the Hurricanes had a 3-0 lead. Bama came out in the second half and delivered one of the finest exhibitions of football ever seen. The offense put 36 points up and LeeRoy and friends shut down Miami for a 36-3 victory. Later we learned Coach Bryant had not fumed and snorted in the dressing room as we all suspected he would. He had told his team, "They had their fun in the first half. Now it's our turn." And indeed it was.

The apparent end of the Alabama-Georgia Tech series is distressing in that the series produced so many great games. The 1962 contest in Atlanta was one of those. The sky was overcast,

spitting intermittent rain, as I made my way to Grant Field and up to the radio booth. Because of the threat of worse rain, the tarpaulin was still on the playing field. The skies were lowering with clouds scuttling back and forth, but it never rained really hard the whole afternoon. Finally the ground crew removed the tarp. The natural grass of the field had been treated (as was normal practice) with chlorophyl to keep it green even in late November, but the tarp had been on so long the grass had reverted to its natural straw color. In the eerie light, the field took on a yellow, almost old gold (Tech color) hue, a most unusual arena. The game would also be unusual.

Tech had a great football team and played a magnificent game. Larry Stallings, who would go on to pro fame, had a tremendous afternoon; and the Engineers' two defensive ends, Ted Davis and Billy Martin, were absolutely terrifying. (Davis hit Namath, attempting to pass, from the offside, a clean lick but one in which he was able to unload with every erg in him. Years later I saw Joe on an interview program after he had become a superstar for the Jets. He was asked the hardest lick he had ever taken and without batting an eye or pausing for a moment he said it was from Ted Davis in the 1962 Georgia Tech game. He couldn't have taken a harder lick, I don't believe. In fact, I don't believe anyone could.)

Bryant had a new wrinkle that day, starting two quarterbacks—one under center and one back at shotgun depth. The idea was to confuse the opposition. I don't think it confused Tech; the Jackets were just going after the football and didn't care who had it. If anything, it might have confused Alabama a bit.

Several years later I saw Jimmy Dill, who had played end for Alabama in that game, in the press box at Knoxville (he was scouting Tennessee for Army). The 1962 Tech game subject came up. He said the new offense may have robbed the Tide—which had gone into the game with a 25-game winning streak—of some confidence. "It seemed to us that the coaches didn't think we could beat them unless we had some tricky stuff," Dill recalled. "I think for the first time I was with Alabama we lost a little confidence and had some doubts."

Tech took a 7-0 lead and it appeared that the Jacket defense was good enough to make it stand up unless Bama got a break. Late in the game that break came. Billy Lothridge, the outstanding Tech

quarterback and punter, was deep in his own territory to punt. After taking the snap he held the ball for a moment to see if Bama had on a rush or a return. It was a return, so he took a few moments to juke around. As he did he slipped, and his knee hit the ground at the nine yard line. He got up and made the punt, but an official was right on the spot and ruled the play dead. Alabama's football, first and goal at the nine.

Alabama scored and Coach Bryant sent Jack Hurlbut in to run the quarterback option. Hurlbut faked his pitch and moved towards the goalline at right end, but was stacked up just short by a linebacker. Alabama's two-point try was denied. Later in the game a Tide pass was intercepted. The Yellow Jacket defender started up the east sidelines, in front of the Bama bench, with number 54, LeeRoy Jordan, bearing down at him from an angle (in those days, most players went both ways and Jordan was the center on offense). The Tech boy shifted the ball from one arm to the other, all the while eyes glued to the menacing approach of LeeRoy, and the ball fumbled out, to be claimed by Jordan for Alabama. Although it was undoubtedly just a mishandle of the football, Tide partisans were—and are—convinced that the Engineer elected to jettison the pigskin rather than accept the tackle LeeRoy was about to deliver.

Bama moved the ball deep into Tech territory, indeed into field goal range, but inexplicably threw a pass. With 45 seconds to play the pass bounced off a Tide receiver and into the hands of a Yellow Jacket defender. Tech claimed the football game and Bama's 25-game winning streak was snapped.

It was a somber Alabama crowd that drifted out of Grant Field that day. Yellow Jacket enthusiasm was at an understandable fever pitch. Coach Bryant left the Tide dressing room and went into the Tech dressing room to congratulate Dodd and the Tech players. It must have been a long, hard walk for the Coach, but I'm sure the Tech boys who were recipients of this fine gesture will never forget it.

I dreaded going to the TV station the next day, but like a trooper I struggled up and headed that way. Coach Bryant said he and Mary Harmon had come back and stayed in a motel and he not only had not seen the film, he had almost not seen anyone since the end of the game and the airplane ride to Tuscaloosa.

There is no question that Coach wanted to talk, and I was the

only one around to listen. I never enjoyed any conversation more. "I must have played that game over a thousand times," he said, "and I don't think I would do too much different." He talked about some options he had and the reasons for the choices he made. He wasn't sure if he was right or wrong, but he was animated and earnest. He was also eager to see the film, and we put it on. After watching for about 20 minutes, he turned to me and said "If Georgia Tech played like that every week, nobody in the world could beat them." We both began to fidget as the second half wound down. He looked at me, smiled, and admitted "I'm about as nervous now as I was yesterday." I said, "I think I'm more so, Coach."

Finally we got to the Alabama score and then watched the two-point attempt. We must have looked at that play 15 or 20 times. Finally Coach Bryant said softly, "Charlie Pell slipped." We wound the film back one more time and I watched Pell, playing right guard. As the ball was snapped the Tide line fired out with straight ahead blocking, and, yes, there was Pell's back foot slipping. He hit his man right at midship, but didn't hit him hard. The defender maintained good position, made his way towards the outside, and the back who would have blocked the linebacker had to take on the lineman, enabling the linebacker to slip through and make the play.

I still have a framed memento of that weekend. On Friday night before the game a group of us had gone to Johnny Esco's Steakhouse to eat. The place was jam-packed. While we waited for a table, we went to the bar for a drink of two. It, too, was packed, literally wall-to-wall humanity. In the course of trying to make my way to the bar I got into a mild altercation with a man who obviously had had too much to drink. Before anything could happen, friends of mine and (presumably) friends of his stepped in to separate us. A short while later the man came over to me. "No hard feelings?" he said, and in reply I stuck out my right hand. To my shock he grabbed my hand, then took a swing at me with his left fist. He hit me a grazing blow, knocking my glasses straight up into the air. A friend of mine at the table, George Barger, caught them like Willie Mays making a basket catch.

I pulled my fist back to retaliate just as the bartender was leaping the bar to intervene, when suddenly my hand was grabbed in a grip of steel. As quickly as it began the problem was over. The management tossed the fellow out and apologized to me, noting that it

was not the first time the guy had been a troublemaker.

The man who had grabbed my hand was a former Georgia football player, Sam Tate. His family owned a bunch of marble quarries and, feeling his strength, I think he had a good bit of marble in his arms. He joined us for dinner and the remainder of the evening was most enjoyable.

At the TV station that Sunday one of the station artists presented me with a sketch which showed a cartoon of me with tattered Alabama pennant, a big black eye and several teeth missing. The inscription said simply, "Well, folks, it was a tough weekend, Tech 7, Alabama 6."

It remained for Auburn to take the brunt of the Alabama chagrin over the loss in Atlanta. Bama rolled 38-0, starting with a 92-yard kickoff return by Butch Wilson.



An altercation the night before the game and a 7-6 loss to Georgia Tech made 1962 in Atlanta a bad year. An artist at WAPI-TV had his version of both outcomes waiting for me that Sunday morning.

Mailon Kent was the Auburn quarterback and he later told me this story. Late in the game Coach Jordan sent in a boy from Bessemer, a substitute, as a flanker. After the first play the boy returned to the huddle, woozy and battered, and told Mailon in all seriousness, "Say, look, if they're that tough on somebody outside, don't give me the ball up the middle."

Alabama climaxed the 10-1 season with one of the finest games I ever saw the Tide play, a 17-0 victory over Oklahoma in the Orange Bowl. President Kennedy was a witness to this game. For some reason he had met the Oklahoma players prior to the game, but not the Tide players. He was also a good friend of Bud Wilkinson, who served as his physical fitness chief. And so he appeared to be cheering for the Sooners. I'm sure Wilkinson and the Oklahoma players would have been happy to have had Kennedy cheering for Alabama if it would have changed the outcome of the game.

Late in the game Coach Bryant pulled the seniors. LeeRoy Jordan, an all-timer for the Tide, trotted out alongside Butch Wilson. As they neared the sidelines LeeRoy impulsively put out an arm and hugged his fellow senior. They were moments away from concluding a three-year career with 29 wins, 2 losses and 2 ties.

A testament to the Jordan-led defenses is that no team scored in double figures against Alabama for almost three years. In mid-November of 1960 Bama came from behind to beat Georgia Tech. All of Tech's points came in the first half. From that point on the Tide did not give up double-digit scoring until Florida upended the Tide at Denny Stadium in mid-October 1963—a total of 28 games, 12 of which were shutouts! Of all the shining records Bryant teams recorded, I think this one may be the most remarkable.

TIMEOUT

Many great and unforgettable players performed at Alabama during the Bryant years. To pick the single outstanding offensive player would produce a lot of debate, but personally I believe Joe Namath would edge out Stabler or Newsome or Fracchia or Musso or Sloan. Defensively, however, there's only one—LeeRoy Jordan, the pride of Excel, Alabama.

Images of number 54 still flash across the mind. His aforementioned menacing approach to the Tech interceptor, causing a fumble by his mere proximity! And later in that same game, even though Alabama's plight was assured, his leaping effort on the last play of the game, trying to wrest the ball away in one final desperation ploy. When Auburn was driving against the Tide at Legion Field, the public address announcer's laconic statement: "Alabama sends in LeeRoy." A moment against Miami when some sixth sense told him Mira was going to pass into the flats. LeeRoy's dash to the outside was too late for an interception, but the receiver was bradded for a loss. And Coach Bryant's rare, rare ultimate praise: "If they stay in bounds, LeeRoy will get 'em."

One of Bryant's "in group" told me he had once asked the Coach when he knew he had someone extraordinary in LeeRoy Jordan. Bryant thought a moment, then replied that one day they were having a severe dog-eat-dog scrimmage on Thomas Field when Jordan was a freshman. After a play, Bryant reported, a player got up and deliberately stepped hard on another player's ankle. "Well, it was LeeRoy," said Bryant. "And when I found out the man he stepped on was his roommate, I had to figure I had a good one."

The story is likely apocryphal. But one thing is certain: LeeRoy Jordan was apocalyptic to Bama opponents' offenses during his brilliant Crimson Tide career.

1963

In a quarter of century there were a number of sad things in connection with Alabama football, notably the accidental death of Tom Bible and the devastating illness of Pat Trammell. Certainly not on such a tragic level, but a bitter pill nevertheless would be the knee injury in the spring of 1962 to Mike Fracchia. Fracchia was considered by many to be the best runner ever at Alabama. That was the opinion of longtime Bryant aide Carney Laslie. Laslie was ruminating about Mike very late one night down at Lake Martin at one of the summer press gatherings. "If Mike Fracchia don't hurt his knee," Carney shook his head, the great mane of white hair flowing, "he's the best football player me and Paul ever had." Him and Paul had a flock of them!

Mike had to sit out the 1962 season. When he returned in 1963 he gave it his all, but the severity of the injury had obviously robbed him of that special spring.

Bama opened that season with Namath leading a 32-7 victory over Georgia. One thing noticed in that game was that a promising young quarterback, Steve Sloan, did not see action. It was therefore assumed he would be redshirted. Therefore, the next week with Alabama comfortably ahead of Tulane, it was a surprise to us Alabama aficionados to see Bryant call Sloan to his side. Steve was surprised, too. He did a double take, then pointed at himself as if to say, "You mean me?" Coach nodded, he did indeed mean Sloan. Steve came into the game and was Namath's backup the rest of the year.

Sloan played an unfortunate role in one of Bama's two Tuscaloosa losses in the Bryant era. Against Florida, Steve was in the secondary. A pass to a Florida receiver was complete and when Steve slipped down getting over to cover, the man went all the way for a touchdown. Namath couldn't get the offense untracked and Bama fell, 10-6.

Bama was supposed to play Miami in Miami on November 23, giving up the traditional open date prior to the Auburn game in order to be on national television. However, the day before President Kennedy was assassinated and almost all college football games that weekend were postponed. The Tide and Miami were rescheduled for December 14. That put Bama meeting Auburn two weeks after Tech and two weeks before Miami.

Coach Bryant always put a lot of stock in the kicking game, particularly in big games. He certainly had reason to expect that to be the case in the Auburn game because the wind that day was a fearsome factor. Alabama won the toss and elected to take the wind. However, Auburn returned the kickoff to near midfield and got a first down before having to punt into the teeth of the ferocious wind. The Alabama safety mishandled the ball, and so although Bama had the wind, the Tide also was backed up to its four-yard line. Alabama picked up a first down, but then had to punt, still with the wind. Buddy French, usually a very reliable punter, did not get off a good one. It went off the side of his foot and Auburn again had good field position. The Tigers were able to run out the quarter and Bama had not been able to use the wind to its advantage.

This was a meeting of gold-plated superstars, Namath for Alabama and Tucker Frederickson for Auburn. Frederickson scored a touchdown, taking a pass from Mailon Kent, but in the fourth quarter with the wind, things seemed to be going Alabama's way. Benny Nelson sprinted through the middle of the Auburn defense on an 80-yard touchdown to close the score to 10-8. Everyone assumed the Tide would get the ball close enough for Tim Davis to kick a field goal with the wind, but it never happened and Auburn had ended Bama's winning streak.

Benny Nelson was a star running back for Alabama for a couple of years. A small group of us was in Tuscaloosa one fall day during Benny's redshirt season. The varsity had gone in and the scrubs and redshirts and freshmen were involved in a late scrimmage. Coach Bryant was in the tower, continually berating Nelson: "Benny Nelson, you're supposed to be a yard to the left; Benny Nelson, you're supposed to pivot on your right foot before you run to the outside;" and on and on.

I told my associates I thought it was silly of Coach Bryant to be spending that much time on Benny Nelson, that we would never

hear anything of him again anyway. Another famous Forney mistake.

Between the loss to Auburn and the suspension of Namath, it was a deflated team that went to Miami to take on the Mira-led Hurricanes. Nevertheless, the Tide jumped from the chute quickly, getting up 17-0 before Mira rallied his troops and closed the gap to 17-12. Miami had moved into scoring position again late in the game when Jackie Sherrill intercepted a pass to save the day for Bama. I saw Sherrill, just a sophomore, waiting to board the buses back to Alabama's Miami Beach hotel, and he was still trying to shake off his nervousness. "I told Coach to let me get in there, that I would intercept one," he kept repeating. He had been as good as his word.

Riding out to the game on the team bus I sat by Mike Fracchia, always a favorite of mine. During the course of the conversation Mike used a pretty fancy four or five syllable word. I kidded him, saying "Hey, Mike! What are you trying to do? Show me up?" He told me he was in a self-improvement program, that he was finding a new word each day, then making sure he used it in a sentence during that day. Mike was an outstanding young man and it's truly tragic his knee was torn up, costing him a pro career.

So it was on to the Sugar Bowl for an intraconference tussle, against Johnny Vaught's Ole Miss Rebels.

The Sugar Bowl was a classic—a snow classic. Steve Sloan quarterbacked in Namath's enforced absence; Tim Davis kicked a record four field goals; Bill Wieseman made a clutch play on Perry Lee Dunn at the goalline; and Alabama got a lot of close calls to win a close one, 12-7.

TIMEOUT

A man very near to Coach Bryant who had served on his staff told me once, after a mild run-in with the big man, "Coach is a football genius. He really is. I've been with him long enough to know that. He flat is a genius at every aspect of football. But, damn it, every now and then he thinks he's a genius at everything!"

For many years Bryant was the leading member of an investment group that met once a month in Tuscaloosa with such "tycoons" as Bill Sellers, Sloan Bashinsky, Jimmy Hinton and Frank Moody in attendance.

A stockbroker told me of the evening that Coach Bryant walked in and announced to one and all, "We're gonna sell every stock we've got." This was greeted by a surprised silence. Bryant went on, "I ran into Clint Murchison on a plane last week and he gave me this tip himself. How much money we got in the fund?" The broker replied that the group's holdings were substantial. "I'm telling you we ought to liquidate completely and buy what Clint Murchison told me about," Bryant continued.

"What's the stock?" someone asked.

Bryant said nothing.

"What's the name of the stock, Paul?" came the question again.

Bryant licked his lips, then eyed the group with a degree of defiance. "I don't remember the damn name, but Clint gave it to me and it's the next to last "D" on the American Stock Exchange."

The group took a heavy position in the stock and it proceeded rapidly downward. As the man said, he was not a genius in everything!

1964

Coach Bryant let Joe Namath back on the team for the 1964 season, and Namath was a thoroughly-dedicated individual. In the opening game against Georgia in Tuscaloosa (Vince Dooley's first game as Georgia head coach), Namath played one of the greatest games I've ever seen and was named AP's national back of the week. In those days Joe had two good legs to go with that great arm and those all-seeing eyes. It was 31-3 and it looked like a man playing against very small boys.

Before that game Coach Bryant wrote to Dooley suggesting they use a ball with white stripes for the night game to make it easier for the fans to see. Vince denied this approval, saying they could discuss that after Namath was gone. Bryant laughed about this later, aware that Dooley had seen through his request.

Victories over Tulane and Vanderbilt followed. Then came North Carolina State, forever to be remembered not as a 21-0 Alabama victory, but as the game in which Namath suffered the first of his fabled knee injuries. Alabama was still playing on natural grass in those days. Namath was running a simple option play to the right, headed towards the north end zone. As he cut upfield, he suddenly dropped to the ground, clutching his knee. He had to be carried off the field. As Steve Sloan took over, the silence in the Alabama stands was positively funereal.

Bama went into the Tennessee game with Bryant particularly concerned about (a) Namath and (b) the punting of Tennessee's Ron Widby. The Coach throughout his career enjoyed beating an opponent by beating him at his strength. Tennessee's strength was Widby. Alabama worked and worked on a punt blocking scheme, figuring by getting one the Vols would be demoralized. Alabama did block one, but Tennessee never missed a beat. It was a tough, hard game, Alabama finally winning 19-8.

Steve Spurrier-led Florida and Alabama played one of the finest games ever seen in Denny Stadium in 1964. The Gators missed on a last-play field goal and the Tide got out with a 17-14 victory.

LSU was back on the schedule that year and Charlie McClendon had a very, very good football team. Alabama won, 17-9, but it might have gone either way but for the outstanding performance of a young man from Guntersville, Frankie McClendon. Charlie Mac certainly did not claim Frankie for a relative that day!

The next game was to be the finale in the long, long Georgia Tech series, until it could be briefly revived again 15 years later. Since the North Carolina State game, Namath had been used only sparingly, Sloan filling the gap most handsomely. However, Steve could not get Bama untracked that day against Tech.

Halftime approached with the Jackets and Bama locked in a 0-0 tie. With a few minutes to go before intermission we can often hear the scraping of chairs in nearby booths, the press box coaching crew moving to get down to the dressing room to help with halftime adjustments. Bama's coaches were up and away with two minutes to go. Seconds later Alabama got the ball back at midfield after a poor Tech punt and Coach Bryant sent in Namath. Joe quickly went back and hit David Ray with a long pass down the sidelines. The Tide scored on the next play. Alabama successfully executed an on-sides kick and Namath was back in. This time he hit Ray Ogden, who took it down close, and in the last few seconds of the half found Ogden again, over the middle for a touchdown. Alabama had scored 14 points in less than a minute and a half and went on to win 24-7.

Alabama and Auburn met on national television in the finale and it was another great game. Tucker Frederickson had an outstanding game for the Tigers, one of the finest individual performances I have ever seen. Namath also had a good afternoon. But in the end it was probably the kicking game that has played a part in so many Alabama-Auburn games that was the difference in this one. Ogden returned the second half kickoff from deep in his own end zone for a 100-yard touchdown and Alabama took a 21-14 decision and the national championship (which was awarded before the bowl games in those days).

It was on to Miami to play Texas in the Orange Bowl, the first time the game had been played at night. It was a classic. Namath

was not expected to play at all, but came in and rallied Bama to near victory, being stopped on a very, very, very close call at the goal-line in a 21-17 setback.

(Gaylon McCollough, Alabama's Academic All-America center and now a noted Birmingham plastic surgeon, says he was on the bottom of the pile, lying across the goal line, and Joe Namath was on top of him. Tommy Nobis, the All-America Longhorn linebacker, says Joe was short. Unfortunately, the officials saw it from Tommy's point of view!)

Although that goalline call is most remembered, because it was Bama's last shot at victory, the key call of the game came earlier. Texas had a pass play called, but the Tide rush got to the Texas quarterback for a sack. A flag downfield and a signal from the official of pass interference against Alabama's Hudson Harris seemed to be a moot point. There was no pass, therefore there could be no pass interference. However, the official decided that if there couldn't be pass interference, there could be defensive holding and stuck Bama with a 41-yard penalty. The Longhorns took advantage of the break for a touchdown just before the half, a big, big play in the game.

Even in a losing cause Namath was so brilliant he was named the player of the game. But his biggest headlines were reserved for a day when he signed an incredible (for those days) \$400,000 contract with the New York Jets. The rest is history.



Joe Namath ranks among Alabama's all-time great football players and all-time great alumni. He visited with us at halftime during a Bama home game.

TIMEOUT

Joe Namath is possibly the finest athlete to play at Alabama since World War II. His career at The Capstone admittedly had its ups and downs, but when he was up—which was most of the time—he was positively electric. As a pro player he had his detractors, in no small part because he fulfilled the image of Broadway Joe pretty well. But I would be hard-pressed to think of an alumnus who has shown any more loyalty to The University of Alabama.

He's given a scholarship in the name of three elderly ladies who befriended him when he was a (believe it or not) shy undergraduate. He has never failed to return to the campus whenever asked for whatever function. He has always helped the coaching staff, past and present, in recruiting. And I, personally, think he has made the transition from superstar athlete to entertainment personality (two exceptionally difficult fields to crack) as well as anyone ever did.

Early one Sunday morning at the Birmingham airport I was putting my daughter on a plane back to Duke. Joe and a few of his buddies came into the large lobby area, and even at that slow time of day every person there recognized him and many came by for autographs, handshakes or simple hellos. I suspect Joe hadn't easily gotten up that early after a stringent Saturday night, but he was unfailingly courteous to all. He went into the coffee shop and was sitting alone when I came back from seeing my daughter away at the gate. The parade to his table continued, but when a break came I went over. "Joe," I offered, "if I sit down beside you maybe they'll think we're talking business and won't bother you."

He thought a moment, then with a big smile—and those incredibly twinkling eyes—said, "Well, it sure won't hurt to try."

Coach Bryant always admired Joe's ability and courage, but never more so than when Joe appeared singing in "Guys and Dolls" in Birmingham. "He's got more guts than anybody I ever saw," his old coach said admiringly after the performance.

He's quite a guy, Joe Namath, and Alabama is proud to claim a share of him.

1965

In 1965 Maury had moved from Birmingham and I had a new role on the Alabama radio network—the play-by-play man. Stan Siegal was my first color man. The opener was a hard way to break in.

Bama opened that year in Athens, Georgia, in a televised game. Alabama was favored, but Georgia had a fine team and Vince Dooley really had them ready. Late in the game Steve Sloan had rallied Bama to the lead, Ray Perkins making a couple of nice catches in a long touchdown drive before Steve took it in for a 17-10 lead. Only a few minutes remained when Georgia got off a 74-yard play, a flea-flicker with the pass going to Pat Hodgson, who lateralled to a back who went all the way. Georgia then made the two-point conversion for an 18-17 lead. The debate raged as to whether Hodgson's knee was on the ground when he made the catch (if so, the play should have been whistled dead there), but as Bryant said on any number of occasions—including that one—you win the game on Saturday, not on Sunday or Monday.

The game provided an example of misplaced fan loyalty. A friend of mine told me that when Georgia went ahead, a man in the Alabama stands went berserk, kicking the bench, slamming things down, beating his rolled up program on the concrete stands, and cursing the fates at full volume. My friend tried to cheer him up. "Look, don't give up," he said. "We've still got time. Steve's having a good day and I believe he can get us close enough for Davis to get a field goal."

The irate fan was not mollified. He looked at my friend, face contorted in fury, and snarled, "If they can't beat the line, — 'em."

Alabama and Ole Miss had met in the Sugar Bowl following the 1964 season, but this was the beginning of a long-awaited home-and-home series between the two Southern powerhouses. Bryant had beaten Vaught with the kicking game in New Orleans and

Vaught, who rightfully thought he had the superior team that day, was eager to get back at Bryant. Kicking again was the downfall of the Rebels in a most exciting contest.

Mississippi had a great middle guard who would go on to be an All-America, Jimmy Keyes, and he was also the placekicker. The Rebels scored first and then Keyes missed the extra point—I think the only one he ever missed in his career. Nevertheless, the Rebels led 16-10 late in the game when Steve Sloan took over.

Sloan marched Bama 85 yards, making a handful of fourth-down plays for first downs by the barest of margins, much as in the Tide's come-from-behind march against Georgia Tech five years earlier. Sloan capped the marvelous individual effort with a nine-yard keeper for the score, and Bama won, 17-16.

Along the way in that final drive, Alabama made use of the tackle-eligible play. After viewing the films, Vaught was furious. It seems on one of those plays the Tide tackle was inside a split end, therefore not eligible. Vaught was a member of the NCAA football rules committee and used his influence to make the tackle-eligible play illegal, defusing an effective Alabama offensive weapon but also ending one of the beautiful differences in college and pro football.

Vandy had a 7-0 lead on Bama, the result of a long punt return, but John David Reitz of Morristown, Tennessee, intercepted a pass and returned it for a touchdown to start a 22-point, fourth quarter Tide scoring parade.

Most memorable Alabama games are wins; a few are losses. There is probably no more memorable tie than the 1965 Tennessee game.

Bama and the Vols were locked in a 7-7 tie, but the Tide had moved into field goal range late in the game. Bama had first down around the 12, but suffered a setback and ended up with third and 16 at the 18. Coach Bryant took Sloan out to give him instructions, sending Kenny Stabler in on a fake field goal attempt. David Ray was in the game, but Stabler stood up to pass. When he found no receiver open, he took off and gained 14 yards to the four. Ordinarily 14 yards is enough for a first down, but it wasn't in this case. Legion Field was pandemonium as the clock was ticking down. Ray tried to get the tee down and Stabler's attention, but the young quarterback got under center, took the snap and threw the ball out of bounds to stop the clock. He stopped the clock, but as it was

fourth down he also killed Bama's chances. With the 7-7 tie, Alabamas were stunned and sickened, Tennessees as gleeful as if they had won the national championship.

Alabama had finished the first half of the season with a 3-1-1 record and no one would have given a dime for the Tide's chances of defending their national championship. But fate had some awfully good things in store for Alabama that year.

The second half of the season started with a very tough football game against Mississippi State in Jackson. The Tide was very happy to win by 10-7.

That put Bama on television against LSU from Baton Rouge. The Tigers moved the game to daytime to accomodate the Big Eye.

LSU's best quarterback—and he was a good one—was Nelson Stokley. But he was having the same sort of problems that had plagued Joe Namath a year earlier, a bad knee; not bad enough to necessitate surgery, but making him always a question mark.

LSU had a good team, but Alabama was still a solid favorite. One of the pivotal questions was whether Stokley could play up to top form.

The teams came out, Alabama running by Mike the Tiger and generating the usual roars, Coach Bryant giving a tip of the hat to the caged mascot.

I was watching LSU warm up, trying to connect names to numbers. I noticed a group of LSU trainers and assistant coaches watching Stokley go through his paces. All he was doing was taking the snap, taking five steps back, setting up, and throwing the ball out in the flat. He had done this several times, apparently testing the knee a bit, and on about the sixth pass he floated back, then fell to the ground (as Namath had) clutching his knee. The trainers were on him immediately, ministering to the knee. It was obvious the young man was in pain. Two trainers made a sling with their arms and Stokley was hustled to the LSU dressing room.

It was 35 minutes until kickoff. At that time in Tiger Stadium the stands are ordinarily alive, particularly the student section, but perhaps owing to the unaccustomedness of the daytime kickoff, the stadium was far more empty than full. And there was no way anyone could have known about Stokley's injury unless he was already in the stadium.

Seconds later the door to our booth burst open and "G.R.," a

friend of mine, who is well-connected enough to have gained a temporary press box pass, rushed in, asking breathlessly, "Don't you all have a phone in here?" We did, of course, have a phone, and he put it to quick use, calling back to Birmingham and adding a wad on Alabama.

It was a cakewalk, 31-7. Steve Bowman scored on a sweep at one point in the rout and we noted that as Steve entered the end zone, not one LSU man was on his feet so effective was the blocking by the Tide forwards. My colleague, Jerry Duncan, modestly says he led the line charge on this play.

I heard later that Cecil Dowdy, an All-America offensive tackle for Alabama, was nauseated that day and kept throwing up in the course of the game. His teammates instructed Sloan where to run or throw the football so they could avoid falling in Dowdy's problem!

Early in the game Bama was on a march and called time out. A trainer rushed to deliver water to the troops, but was called back to the bench. Tide players huddled on the field called for water. The trainer ran out a few yards onto the field and hollered, "Coach says you can have water after you score!"

Alabama followed this with solid victories over South Carolina and Auburn and earned a return visit to the Orange Bowl, there to take on Bob Devaney's monstrous Nebraska Cornhuskers.

Much was made of Nebraska's decided weight advantage, some 80 pounds per man on the line if you believed the program weights (I didn't), but considerable regardless. However, Coach Bryant was still getting good mileage out of the "little quick ones" at this point. (Jim Murray, the columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, once commented about the Alabama team that "They appear to be small, but how do you weigh a school of sharks?")

Alabama's gameplan for Nebraska was devastating, pivoting around superior speed, misdirection plays, and a super passing attack, including tackle eligible passes. Steve Sloan had a magnificent night and Alabama went on to beat Nebraska 39-28. Because LSU had defeated Arkansas and UCLA had knocked off Michigan State in earlier bowl games, Alabama and Nebraska were playing for the national championship. (The AP, because Alabama had won its title last year, then lost in the Orange Bowl, decided to change policy and award its championship following the bowl games.) The Tide was equal to the occasion.

I've been told that Coach Bryant watched Nebraska warm up and, despite being impressed with their size, was amazed at their lack of quickness. "We might beat these cats pretty good," he told one of his assistants.

With Bowman and Wayne Trimble and Frank Canterbury and Ray Perkins and Dennis Homan and of course Sloan and our good friend Jerry Duncan, Alabama had a magnificent night. The Tide tormented Nebraska with a couple of successful onside kicks. Carney Laslie watched one such kick bounce and spin towards a Nebraska lineman, only to flip away just as he made his move to dive on it, to be covered by an Alabama player. The boy looked up in frustration. "What do I do?!" he said to no one in particular. "You're doing just fine, son, just fine," answered Carney.

Certainly Alabama did just fine in winning a second consecutive national championship and the third in Bryant's eight years back.

However, the 28 points Nebraska scored in the 39-28 decision was the most allowed by a Bryant Alabama team.

TIMEOUT

In 1960 Coach Bryant initiated his summer press gathering. Coach had a nice cabin on Lake Martin near Alexander City (which I'm sure Tom Russell and the Russell family made available to him) and the lakeside "hideaway" was one of his favorite spots. Because of its proximity to Lee County a number of influential Auburn people, including Dr. Ralph Draughon, the president at that time, and Jeff Beard, the athletics director, had homes there. Lake Martin was the scene of the closest thing to "detente" between the two schools.

The press gatherings, held in late July or early August, began as small, almost family-type get-togethers. Most of the few of us (sportswriters and broadcasters) could stay in the Bryant cabin with Coach prevailing on a couple of neighbors to take the rest of the group. It was a low-key, pleasant outing featuring golf on Monday (Tom York and Phil Snow generally vying for the "championship" but prizes for everyone).

Early evenings were often spent cruising Lake Martin. One memorable evening Coach Bryant was our pilot and, since dark had begun to close in, he admonished those in the front of the party boat to watch out for him. Suddenly there was a thump; we had come too close to the shoreline. "Who the hell is supposed to be watching out up there," thundered Bryant. "I'm sorry, Paul," came the firm reply from forward. After a pause, Coach said "Okay, Dr. Rose. Just wondering."

The nights featured cocktails and fellowship, then large, succulent steaks cooked by the Coach himself with the trimmings superbly supervised by Mary Harmon. Depending upon the time and inclination, a few pasteboards were shuffled around before turning in.

In the mornings Coach would have a great big old-timey breakfast at the restaurant at Kowaliga Beach. Country sausage, big homemade biscuits, eggs, grits and redeye gravy, squealers (little fried catfish), juice and coffee were the fare; and a few Bloody Marys were usually around. Following breakfast there was a press conference, Coach outlining his team in depth, position by position; the way the season and the conference looked to him; etc.

In various forms he held these gatherings for the remainder of his career and they have since been copied by virtually every program. Later they became much larger with virtually all the Alabama press and radio and television corps, a few influential journalists from neighboring states, Bama assistant football coaches and a few head coaches from other Tide teams, and, for awhile, representatives of many of the bowl games. This necessitated more involved logistical planning to get everyone squared away. Nevertheless, places were found for all in the cabins at Kowaliga and those happy times provide treasured memories for all who participated in them.

There were many memorable occurrences at these outings. Many of us watched the first man step on the moon from Coach Bryant's cabin. (There was a false alarm, "There they are!" from Coach when the network showed an animated graphic of what to expect, followed by an admonition from Mary Harmon, "Paul, that's just a cartoon.") Of less substance, but great fun, were the poker games, boat rides, reckless water skiing, skinny dipping (with the added competitive fillip of leaping out of the water to see who could get certain portions of their anatomy highest above the water line, disputes resolved by chief judge Dude Hennessey).



One of the most enjoyable aspects of each year as Alabama's broadcaster was Coach Bryant's preseason press party, a summertime weekend of golf, cards and football talk.

One of the funniest incidents involved George Smith, then sports editor of the Anniston Star (and whose son was a scholarship snapperback for Alabama in the mid-1970s). It may fairly be said of George that he gave new dimension to the definition of "good ol' boy;" it could also be said that he would speak out forthrightly. No one ever accused him of being a shrinking violet.

(When Alabama stayed at the Belleview Stratford for the Liberty Bowl it was the first time George had been much further north than Rock City. He was anxious to prove George Wallace's dictum that Alabama people were just as cultured and refined as those from any other part of the USA. So when the bar waitress at the Belleview Stratford asked George for his order, he reasoned that sophisticates drank Scotch whiskey; and he also knew that anyone who was a God-fearing Southern patriot and not some yellow-bellied left-winger drank Dr Pepper. His order of the combination brought gasps from his associates, complete bafflement to the waitress. The Belleview Stratford was where Legionnaires Disease broke out years later, perhaps owing its origins to George's order.)

With the large gathering for Coach's press party, the cabins were extremely crowded. Beds in the cabins varied sharply in size and apparent comfort. One year George was one of the earliest arrivals on the scene and promptly threw his luggage on the largest bed, staking his claim loudly to all who entered later.

A new member of Bryant's staff that year was John David Crow, who had won the Heisman Trophy under Bryant at Texas A&M. He had later been an all-pro performer. John was (and is) a man's man. He made Rambo look like a pantywaist. John had not been around to hear George's bed-possession pronouncement; he decided to turn in early while most of us were still carousing in the water or at the card tables. Crow moved George's luggage to the floor and went to sleep in the big double bed.

When Smith stumbled to bed in the wee hours carrying a load of spirits (and, perhaps, some Dr Pepper), he was startled to feel a human form in his bed. That was more than enough provocation to stir the Smith ire; the resulting firestorm against the interloper raised Crow, who blinked at George. Smith was agasp. "Oh, 'scuse me, John David," he said meekly. Crow fell back to his pillow; George made himself as comfortable as possible on the rug beside the big bed.

The next day Crow had to return to Tuscaloosa, but George didn't know that. Although the bed was empty and there was no sign of Crow's presence when Smith was ready to call it a night, he was taking no chances. George curled up again on the rug and slept through the night next to the empty bed. I, for one, admired his discretion greatly. You just can't be too careful; John David might have come back.

Although members of the Alabama press are as competitive as anywhere in a very competitive business, camaraderie among members of the Alabama corps is greater than anywhere I've ever known of. I am convinced that Coach Bryant's summer press gatherings were instrumental in this unique situation.

1966

Alabama had perhaps its greatest team in 1966, an undefeated squad that probably received less than it deserved in terms of national recognition. Certainly it must have been the quickest, fastest offensive line Alabama ever had because Coach Bryant never said it was "too slow." I never heard him fail to say that about any other Alabama offensive line, at least in the preseason. What he did say in the preseason was that, with Sloan's graduation, he didn't think he had a quarterback. However, he was going to try to get Kenny Stabler ready to play.

Alabama opened with a 34-0 victory over Louisiana Tech that year at Legion Field in Birmingham. It turned out to be a hard sellout because of day-of-game sales, but in the weeks leading up to the game it took some low-priced ducat hustling by one of the big food chains in Birmingham to get most of the tickets into the hands of John Q. Public. Although the opposition was lightweight, Stabler showed his stuff.

That was just a warmup for one of the hardest-hitting football games ever seen, a 17-7 Alabama win over a now-frustrated John Vaught Ole Miss team.

The fourth game was against Tennessee in Knoxville, and it was to become a classic.

Pride and I went to Gatlinburg with the Hartsfields and the Smiths, and in that delightful non-community we made a determined effort to sharply decrease the inventory of Scotch whiskey in East Tennessee on Thursday and Friday evenings. Our efforts first showed in the caliber of golf played Friday.

Friday night, at the conclusion of a long cocktail hour and prior to dinner, we called back to Birmingham and bet a big wad on Alabama, minus 6 points for the next afternoon.

Saturday dawned gray and threatening, and the cottage where we all stayed was suffering from a general, mutual, total, ghastly

hangover. Five people could try the hair of the dog, but since I was broadcasting that day I had to postpone my own personal therapy. I drove to Knoxville by myself. The skies were getting grayer and the report on the radio was "a definite possibility" for rain. Among other things, that report was a great understatement.

This was Pride's first trip to an Alabama game in Knoxville. I had told her that every Bama fan needed to see at least one Tide game at Neyland Stadium/Shields-Watkins Field. She and the other two couples were coming over later.

I arrived about two hours prior to kickoff. I grabbed a hot dog, bag of potato chips and a cup of black coffee and stood at the counter on the second deck of the press box. In the distance I could see a dark cloud advancing toward the stadium. Within 45 minutes the deluge had begun. It was a lulu.

While the two teams worked out in the downpour, all I could think of was that Alabama's quickness would be negated by the conditions. And I had a large hunk of a bet that had been called back to Birmingham under stupor the night before.

My feeling of nervousness was not alleviated in the early going. Alabama won the toss and, uncharacteristically for the conditions, elected to receive. Bama fumbled on the first play and Tennessee capitalized immediately, Dewey "Swamp Rat" Warren passing to Austin Denny for the Vols' touchdown.

The game had hardly begun and already Bama's gameplan had to be changed. It was left to Les Kelley, the big fullback from Cullman, to carry the brunt of the offensive load. He would carry the ball some 26 times that day.

The passing of Snake Stabler to the great receivers, Perkins and Homan, was hobbled by the mire. Tennessee led 10-0 at the half and I could see not only my bet, but also Bama's chances for victory, going aglimmering. An old friend, Sam Boykin, stuck his head in our booth and I joined him during my halftime break. We commiserated on the fact we had made bad bets. We tried to call Birmingham and get a half-timer, but the bookies were wisely unreachable.

Bama's second half comeback and holdon were truly magnificent. It was one of the most exciting games I have ever seen. We finally scored and went for two. Wayne Cook, a tight end from Montgomery, made a fantastic catch and dive into the end zone to get the

two. Then the Tide worked it down and one of the great toes and calm nerves of the Davis family (Steve) kicked Alabama to an 11-10 lead with just moments remaining. But the Vols were not through. Warren completed a couple of passes, one long one, and Tennessee had a very makeable—though sharply angled—field goal shot at the buzzer. The kick was away and it was awfully close, but when I saw an orange raingear-clad Tennessee manager behind the goal-post grab his head and sink despondently to the ground, I knew it had missed. It had. Alabama had won.

I believe more than any other game, I was shaking like a leaf at the end of that one. . .doubtless a combination of nerves, hangover, and severe cashflow problems.

Bama next handled Vanderbilt and Mississippi State in relatively easy fashion, and then the LSU Bengal Tigers came to Birmingham for a day game.

The bookies cleaned up on the Tennessee game, but two of my friends, George and Charles, got back at them substantially three weeks later. Alabama had opened as an 18-point favorite and, as usual, the Tide faithful had bet the game up a couple of points to 20 by Saturday morning. George and Charles had bet Alabama at 18 and 19 and finally at 20 and, to put it mildly, they had a heavy load riding on Alabama that day. They went to a pregame cocktail party, a big one, complete with band. Subject number 1, of course, was the Alabama football team, but 1A was how much they had wagered on Alabama against the Bengals. When they totaled it all up they figured prudence dictated they place a bet on LSU plus the points in the remote hope of middling it, but certainly to unload part of the weight of the bet itself. They were preparing to call the bookie when they heard the line had gone to 21.

A light went on in George's inventive mind and he told Charles, "Wait a minute. Let's not call him just yet." It was about time to leave the party for the game. George approached the bandleader and asked if a request to play a spirited rendition of "Yea, Alabama" might not be acceded to. And, more than that, if he would begin on George's signal. The bandleader agreed. George moved towards the telephone, then gave the signal. With the band playing, George made his call to the bookie, who could hear the sounds of party over the line. George, faking it, asked boozily, "What do you

have the mighty Tide?" The bookie, without pause, said, "George, I've moved that to 22."

George quickly sobered up and said "Fine, I'll take LSU plus 22 for \$2,000."

Alabama defeated LSU 21-0 that afternoon and George and Charles were in fat city, winning both ways.

That was the first of four straight shutouts—including a 31-0 nationally-televised victory over Auburn—to close out the season. Bama earned a berth in the Sugar Bowl against Nebraska. Playing for nothing, because the AP had reverted to its policy of awarding its national championship based on regular season play only (since Notre Dame was number one despite its infamous 10-10 tie against Michigan State and not going to bowl games in those days), Alabama nevertheless played magnificently, one of its finest hours ever.

I had bet Alabama several times leading up to New Year's Day and when I added it up I realized I had \$900 riding on the Tide. I figured, what the hell, I might as well round it off to \$1,000. I called the bookie and he told me the line had moved to 10. It had started off at 6.

I said "Has anybody bet Nebraska?" He snorted derisively, "I ain't got nobody that can SPELL Nebraska."

I didn't go to New Orleans, electing to stay in Birmingham and watch the game on television. I assumed a prayerful attitude at a friend's house to watch. I believe almost every Alabama fan who was alive and kicking remembers the very first play as Ray Perkins ran a circle pattern across the center and Stabler hit him for about a 45-yard gain.

I relaxed and oozed all over my host's comfortable chair, confident I would be \$1,000 richer when the day was done. Alabama coasted to a 34-7 victory.

TIMEOUT

It was about this time that I met Ralph Huneycutt. Ralph was (and still is, I presume) a big guy, bluff and hearty—a great salesman type who was in some steel-related business.

I met him at The Birmingham Country Club, where the bar stayed open late, and he and I were able to sit and sip for a long, long time talking about one of our favorite subjects—Paul Bryant.

Ralph had been one of the very highly sought-after prospects in the East Tennessee-Kentucky area just after Bryant went to Kentucky as head football coach. In those days Bryant was willing to dedicate himself totally to recruiting a young player. And when he did, it was usually sayonara for the opposition.

Ralph, who was known as “Honey,” told me that when he was a high school senior, there was no doubt he was going to play for Bryant at Kentucky. The man who came to his house and charmed his parents was more than Ralph himself ever dreamed he could be. It was practically certain Honey would be headed for Lexington to wear Kentucky blue.

Ralph, in telling the story that night, waxed almost lyrical in talking about Bryant, remembering the big man with the confident smile sitting in the car with Ralph as he sold the young player on Kentucky. But as sometimes happens in the world of college football recruiting (even in those comparatively innocent times), Honey was wavering as signing date approached. He had gotten involved with Tennessee recruiters and met General Neyland. It's difficult to believe that Neyland involved himself in recruiting, certainly hard to imagine him having a kind word or a smile for a recruit. Nevertheless, for whatever reasons, Honey committed to the University of Tennessee. He told me that a loud Vol alumnus, not wanting such a sweet, quiet country boy to suffer the last minute recruiting pressures, hid Ralph out at a lake cabin for several days, until Tennessee could get Ralph's name on the dotted line. (Alabama has done the same thing on occasion, and so has every other bigtime or would-be bigtime football school.)

After signing, Ralph was terrified at the prospect of having to face Coach Bryant. Sure enough, Bryant's car was parked outside his home when he arrived. Honey said he was crying as he went into the

house and saw the stern visage of PWB looking at him.

Bryant accepted his loss, of course. He went back with Honey to his room. He told him he had made a mistake, but wished him good luck at Tennessee.

When Ralph arrived at Tennessee as a freshman, one of the first events was a giant team meeting, freshmen and returning varsity members. Vol assistant coaches gave them information as to practice schedules, registration, dorm procedures and the like. Towards the end of the meeting there was a silence in the room. Then from the back came General Robert Neyland, striding purposefully through the assembly of young players. He went to the blackboard, took a piece of chalk, and scrawled one word across the board: ALABAMA. That was all. Then he strode out of the room. "We got the message," said Honey.

Honey soon found himself as the starting center for the 1947 Vols. The Kentucky game that year was in Lexington and as he went out onto the field for pregame warmups the first person he saw was Bryant. "Just knowing he was in the area bothered me," he admitted. Tennessee went through its warmups, Honey snapping the ball back to the tailbacks. Suddenly Ralph was conscious of a presence—a certain change in the surroundings. He glanced up and there were the piercing eyes below the brim of the gray hat. His bones turned to jelly, he said, as they had when he was a frightened recruit.

Bryant said softly, "Honey, I've got a real good center, Jay Rhodemyer. He's all-conference. If you'd come with me, you'd been All-America." Then he walked away.

Ralph Huneycutt will never forget Paul Bryant.

1967

For every rise I suppose there is a fall, and 1967 began something of a down era for the Crimson Tide—off in the sense that it wasn't absolutely stunning as the previous nine years had been. The fall would in no way compare to the rise we had enjoyed.

If there is one tie game remembered as much as the 1965 Tennessee contest, it would be the opener against the Florida State Seminoles in 1967, then as now a wide open run and gun football team.

Although Ray Perkins had graduated, Dennis Homan was still there. Snake Stabler had opened up in the Bryant doghouse, which was to say he had not opened up the game, but he soon made an appearance and for the rest of the year the offense was almost completely Stabler to Homan.

Alabama's 1966 defense had allowed only 37 points in regular season play and most of the starters were returning. As the FSU game went along, we couldn't help but wonder where that defense was. It was one of the damndest up and down offensive shows I've ever seen and ended up with FSU disdaining the try for two points and kicking an extra point for a 37-37 tie.

About a week before the opener I got a call from someone in the ABC-TV sports department, who told me the network was preparing a special on Coach Bryant to be aired the following spring. He wanted to know if it would be all right for ABC to tie a microphone onto mine (this was prior to the use of headset mikes) to get a play-by-play recording for checking game films, etc. I gave them permission to do so. When I arrived at the Legion Field booth that night there was an ABC microphone duct-taped to mine.

I didn't think anything more about it. Certainly the game was sufficiently wild to keep my total concentration, particularly when the scoreboard went out.

Later, when the special was to be aired, we were invited to supper and to watch the show with friends of ours. We had a very pleasant dinner, then settled back before our host's 25-inch set. The program came on and I was startled to hear my own voice flowing out, doing play-by-play of the Florida State game. The recording of my broadcast was used intermittently throughout the entire program. I was flattered, but nonetheless astonished to hear this. No one from ABC had contacted me or Alabama's athletics department; there were no conversations, no correspondence. I thought at the least they would have let the Alabama sports information office know so I could at least have gotten a tape of the program. (Later Donn Bernstein of ABC and Ron Grillo of the Birmingham ABC affiliate, WBRC-TV, combined to get one for me and it's now in my "archives.")

The only reason I mention my surprise network "debut," is that, Boone, if there was some oversight on payment my Social Security number is 421-14-2866 and it may be sent to Luckie & Forney in Birmingham.

Doug Dickey was head coach at Tennessee and he had the Vols cranked up. Bama was shellacked in Birmingham, 24-13, as the Big Orange gained a measure of revenge for the 11-10 setback a year earlier.

The next week we went to Clemson, the first time I had broadcast from or even seen a game in Death Valley. It was a close one, but Bama pulled out a 13-10 win.

More memorable than the game was the spread Clemson served up in the press box. It was like being at an all-day singing and dinner on the grounds—platters of fried chicken, ham, cold cuts, cheeses, homegrown vegetables by the droves, cakes, pies. It was something to behold and enjoy, enjoy!

Also memorable was seeing the Tigers enter the arena. It was the Clemson custom to dress several blocks away, then walk down the hill and down through the steps of the south end of the field to the cheers of their frenzied supporters. I really understood then why Frank Howard, the Bard of Barlow Bend (Alabama), was proud of Death Valley.

After the game he did his usual number on Bryant (who had been

a player when Howard was an assistant coach at Bama), slapping at him a couple of times with his rolled up program as the two men met in the center of the field after the game.

From Death Valley two weeks later the Tide traveled to Deaf Valley, the bedlam and din of Tiger Stadium in Baton Rouge. Only an absolutely incredible performance by the old serpent, Kenny Stabler, and a missed extra point try by LSU, enabled the Tide to get out in a 7-6 squeaker. This was a good night for those Bama fans who wager, because most had been able to bet the Tide at pick it (even) or, at most, a half point favorite.

The group I had gone down with on one of Grantland Rice's fun tours to the French Quarter, New Orleans, and on to Baton Rouge just for the game, was feeling prosperous and very happy about things the next day. Since I was no longer doing the Sunday show I could participate in the weekend to the fullest. Part of the tour included going out to Tulane Stadium Sunday afternoon to see the new pro team, the Saints, play. The opposition that day was Dallas, featuring Dandy Don Meredith and Tide immortal LeeRoy Jordan.

I got the day started with a couple of milk punches before eating breakfast, then went to an impromptu cocktail party being thrown in the Fountainsbleu Motel to have a few Bloody Marys to sort of clear the air. Being conditioned to Alabama's blue laws and to the general practice of alcohol in stadiums being frowned upon, I was quite stealthy about carrying a pint of Scotch into the stadium, and even more hesitant about the prospect of ordering ice only. It had been a long time since I had been in Tulane Stadium proper rather than in the press box.

My fear of penalty for drinking during the game was quickly allayed as I asked the concessionaire in half-whisper if I could buy just a cup of ice. The wonderful Cajun voice came back loud and strong, "Wanna two bits, half a buck, or dollar size?" I think I settled for two half buck cups and went in to sit with Grantland and his wife.

My traveling companions were George Stuart, Hilton Locke and Paul Woodall. The four of us caught a cab back to downtown New Orleans after a memorable game—irate New Orleans fans had interrupted play for some 12 minutes with their screams and threats at an official who had wronged the home team. A highlight of the afternoon was an incredible halftime show featuring a man with a jetpack on his back who soared into the sky and went under the

goalpost crossbar before settling back down into the middle of the field. It was the first time I had ever seen this. Some of the people in our group did not talk about this for a week or so, apparently because they were not sure everyone had seen the same thing they had!

Our group decided we had better get a bite to eat before catching the charter flight back to Alabama and we went, at my suggestion, to Arnaud's. In the cab I had raved about how good Shrimp Arnaud's was. When the waiter came for our order, George, Hilton and Paul each ordered a Shrimp Arnaud's. "That's three Shrimp Arnaud's," said the waiter, turning to take my order. "And that's what I'll have, also," I said. "A Shrimp Arnaud's," he repeated. "No," I clarified. "I'll have THREE Shrimp Arnaud's." And I did.

After our meal we caught a cab to head for the airport. En route George asked the driver to stop at a package store. "I need to get a six-pack," he explained. The driver stopped at a store in the new darkness, and George went in. When he returned he had six bottles of Chivas Regal. He gave each of us one and kept the rest for himself. Now that's what I call a six-pack!

It was a Southern Airlines charter we returning on, and it was unaccountably delayed, so the Alabama delegation had some time to spend in the New Orleans airport bar. It was not what we really needed!

When the flight was called, we zipped out of the bar. Paul Woodall and I ran some very deft pass patterns in the lobby of the airport, and were cheered for our agility by several passers-by. Finally we made our way to and through the doorway to the field, and across the tarmac to the waiting plane. Around the area were several City of New Orleans police cars, blue lights flashing. We got aboard and as we found our seats a bitter, angry voice came over the PA system: "We're going to take you back to Birmingham, but if we have any undue activity by any of you we'll land this plane in Meridian or Columbus so fast it will make your head spin!"

We were dumbfounded by this, but learned later that Southern had had problems earlier in the day from a group of Huntsvillians. The Huntsville group had prepared to return on a regular Southern flight, only to learn it had been oversold (why an airlines would oversell a flight from New Orleans to anywhere in Alabama the weekend Bama is playing at LSU is beyond my comprehension, but

perhaps explains why Southern was forced to merge into what is now Republic Airlines). Those Huntsvillians put off the plane were irate, and one, unfortunately, took a swing at a stewardess. That's why the police were there and why we were greeted so uncere- moniously for our flight back to Alabama.

The Alabama-Auburn game that year was played in the worst weather I have ever seen a game played, not only because of the downpour that turned Legion Field into a sea of mud, but because of a ferocious wind. Throughout the day umbrellas could be seen turning inside out and blowing out of the stadium. Those of us in the open radio booth in the press box (the windows are left open re- gardless of weather in order to allow crowd noise into the broad- cast) were soaked to the skin and my two charts on the teams— done in vari-colored inks—were just pastel smears by the time the game was over.

Auburn took a 3-0 lead and it looked like that would hold up, until Kenny Stabler managed to get away down the sidelines to give Bama a 7-3 victory. Coach Jordan was understandably anguished because he felt his captain, Gusty Yearout, would have made the play had Bama tight end Dennis Dixon not held him. However, many of my Alabama friends thought Dixon should have won the Jacobs Blocking Trophy for his performance on that play!

The flu hit the Crimson Tide at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas and Gene Stallings became one of the few Bryant pupils to beat the old master, Texas A&M taking a 20-16 victory. Curley Hallman of Northport, who would later serve as a member of Bryant's coach- ing staff (after Alabama had turned him down for a football schol- arship), had a big interception for the Aggies in that game.

TIMEOUT

Many people have the mistaken idea that the broadcast team travels with the football squad and official party. This may be the case when the broadcasters are hired by the school or if the school is the actual producer of the broadcasts, but such was not the case in my years. Although through the years we were included with the official party perhaps a dozen times, we always reimbursed The University for our fare. In all probability we could have traveled more regularly with the team, but it was our feeling that Coach Bryant had enough to worry about without us along.

On those occasions when we did go with the team it was very enjoyable; and we never failed to be impressed with the demeanor of the boys on the squad. There was practically no hollering or boisterousness of any kind. Once, coming back from Gainesville, we were seated with Jim Goostree. Jim is not only an ace golfer (he and pro Mason Rudolph were boyhood friends in Tennessee and played about even until Mason took the pro trail and Jim became one of the nation's most highly-regarded trainers), but also a superior gin player. I did my best to occupy myself other than challenging Goostree with the pasteboards. (Jim's games are generally with the likes of Ellis Taylor, Gyp Smith, and the late Red Pope, which is a fast track.)

*In order to steer the conversation away from the possibility of a few quick shuffles, I turned to talk to one of the flight attendants on the Southern charter. I asked her if the "stews" enjoyed being on the football charters and she assured me she did. She was chatty and affable as we winged our way towards Tuscaloosa. She said a few teams gave them problems with roistering and other juvenile behavior, but that Alabama was a favorite of all the crew "because we love Coach Bryant and because the players are so well-behaved and courteous." I thought to myself the players were probably that way because they loved Coach Bryant, too. . . loved **not** being in his doghouse, that is.*

Goostree still had a deck of cards in his itching palm, so I probed further, asking which teams gave them problems. She hesitated, but finally put the finger on the Florida Gators. She told of their use of loud, bad language; of a "pillow fight" with the seat headrest

antimaccassars; and finally of a few seats being ripped apart and stuffing pulled out before order was restored.

I was surprised at the severity of the team's bad behavior as described by the young lady, but Junior Davis (a good offensive tackle from the Birmingham area who is now a successful trucking executive) was aghast. His eyes got wider and wider with each revelation. At the end he exclaimed fervently, "Gah-lee, Coach Bryant would make us walk home if we did anything like that!" His teammates around him nodded in knowing assent.

1968

Stabler and Homan were among the most severe graduation losses as Bama prepared for the 1968 season. The opener that year was against Virginia Tech in Birmingham, in most years what we would expect to be a breather. It was anything but that. In a bitterly-fought game Alabama finally came out on top, 14-7. The next week Southern Miss almost got us in Mobile, a field goal proving the difference.

That set the stage for what must be one of John Vaught's sweetest victories in his long, successful reign at Ole Miss. The Rebels defeated Bama 10-8 in Jackson, and it would have been a shutout but for a late, great effort by Mike Hall to block a punt.

Mike played another good game against Tennessee, but the Tide just didn't have the firepower the Vols did and Tennessee took a 10-9 decision in Knoxville. That made it back-to-back victories for the Orangemen.

The Tide struggled in beating Clemson, Mississippi State and LSU and there was legitimate concern the Alabama bowl streak was in jeopardy. Bama still had to go to Miami and a strong Auburn team was waiting at the end of the year.

Alabama's offense was pretty much confined to the pass. Scott Hunter was the quarterback and he did have a fine arm, but Scott would be the first to admit that his speed and mobility (or lack thereof) were liabilities, and opposing defenses knew pretty much what to expect.

Bama did get by Miami, 14-6, clinching a Gator Bowl bid.

The Tide was 7-2 going to the Auburn game, but both losses were in SEC play and the wins had not come over strong opposition. Auburn was strong. However, as he so often did, Coach Bryant came up with another wrinkle to befuddle the Tigers. Mike Hall, the outstanding linebacker, was slipped into a jersey to make

him an eligible pass receiver, sent in at tight end, and caught the winning touchdown pass in a 24-16 victory.

That was a sweet ending to a rather lackluster regular season.

One of the Tide's worst performances in his 25 years came in the Gator Bowl. A strong Missouri team absolutely shellacked the Tide, 35-10.

1969

The 1969 season began with Bama going to Virginia Tech's stadium in Blacksburg. Blacksburg is very picturesque and pretty in its Blue Ridge Mountains setting, but difficult to get to. The team flew into Roanoke and bused over, no short trip.

The broadcast crew went "courtesy" of the Grantland Rice tours again, on a small Southern Airlines charter to Roanoke. Bert Bank, our producer, had a friend along with him on the trip, the late Joe Goodwyn, then lieutenant governor of the State of Alabama.

We left Roanoke on a chartered press bus (following the team buses) around 10:30 a.m. game day. The buses would go directly from the stadium to the airport for the trip home to Alabama. Traffic on the road over was incredibly heavy. We were stopped dead still in the jam when I saw Coach Bryant emerge enraged. He was chewing out highway patrolmen, Alabama and Virginia officers, left and right. Finally they managed to get us on track and we arrived at the stadium not too late.

This game was the debut for Johnny Musso, the highly-heralded running back from Birmingham. Johnny was deep for the opening kickoff. Unbeknown to Musso (or any of us) was the Virginia Tech practice of firing a cannon just as the kicker's toe hit the football. (I hope that irritating tradition has been ended.) Johnny told me later that he was very, very nervous anyway watching the kickoff man and waiting for the football, and when he heard the explosion he thought, "Oh, my Lord, not only will I probably fumble the kickoff, but I've also been shot!"

Johnny didn't fumble and he wasn't shot and he had a great day, one of many to come. Our 17-13 victory was a very grateful one.

They have a nice, big booth for the visiting radio crew in Blacksburg and so Bert and Joe were sitting behind us as we did the broadcast. Joe Goodwyn was a real fine guy and, although I did not know him well, I was very fond of him. And I know he was a hard working

man in the state legislature. Nevertheless, I don't think it's giving away any secrets to say that Joe, as many "pols," enjoyed a cocktail or two now and then. He arrived at the stadium with a fifth of Wild Turkey tucked away. Because of the intensity of the game, I had not been aware of anything other than our work going on in the press box. However, when the game was over and we were packing up our gear, one of the first things I noticed was the bottle of Wild Turkey on the floor. It had been full some two and a half hours earlier; now it was empty. That turkey was flat dead! And it was obvious to me then that its owner had packed it away singlehandedly.

When we got downstairs to the press bus there were a few people already there, but we knew it would be awhile before the writers wrapped up their stories. Joe was already on the bus, taking a light nap (with which I was totally sympathetic). After a short while, Joe got up and stretched and walked to the front of the bus. The motor had been idling for about 15 minutes. Joe sat down in the driver's seat and began to race the motor. I wasn't sure exactly what he had in mind, but I did realize that should a forward gear be engaged we would plow right into one of the steel stanchions supporting the VPI stadium. Several of us went forward and gingerly eased off the bus. Happily, Joe contented himself with racing the motor. Eventually we got the real driver and the remainder of the press corps boarded and headed for the Roanoke airport.

At the airport Joe had another libation or two. He took the permanent count on the flight back, sprawled in ungainly fashion over a couple of seats, snoring loudly and smelling very much like a whiskey barrell in the bargain. The stewardess peered rather anxiously at him each time she passed. Bert Bank took notice of this, and on one of her trips by said, "Honey, do you realize that if something happened to Governor George Wallace, this man would be governor of the State of Alabama?" She recoiled, almost in horror. "You've got to be kidding?" she said.

Two weeks later came The Game, one that all fans and most of a national television audience will remember forever. It was the famous shootout between Scott Hunter and Ole Miss' Archie Manning in Birmingham's Legion Field, a 33-32 Tide victory. It was a classic. Pride had watched on television and she told me later she

would never forget the closeup of Archie Manning, tears streaming down his face, at the conclusion of the game.

We went from the high of that incredible victory to the depths in one week. In Nashville Vanderbilt earned one of its infrequent victories over the Tide. Johnny Musso had been left in Tuscaloosa to recuperate from injury. In retrospect, that was probably a mistake. With Johnny along, Bama might have been able to salvage victory, but Coach Bryant undoubtedly thought he had enough troops without him. At the end of the game I was struck with the intensity of the Vandy fans reveling in their victory over Paul Bryant—not Alabama, but Bryant. The Coach was jeered and taunted as he made his way out of the stadium. Such is the price of success; and, undoubtedly, added incentive not to let it happen again (as if Coach Bryant needed additional incentive to win). It didn't happen again against Vanderbilt.

The next week Tennessee really wrecked the Tide, 41-14 at Legion Field. Steve Kiner, the fine Vol linebacker, was quoted after the game as saying Bama players didn't seem to have pride in that red jersey anymore and that they were letting Coach Bryant down. It was a galling remark and I'm sure it stuck in Coach Bryant's craw for a long time. In my own case I was so dismayed that I apparently spent some time reporting on airplanes flying over Legion Field on their landing path to the Birmingham airport. One person wrote me saying I didn't have enough guts to report the way Alabama was losing, instead giving a play-by-play of planes landing.

After Tennessee we went to Death Valley. Fortunately we didn't make many trips to Clemson. I feel sure that even the most anorexic of sportscasters would become stylishly stout following the Tigers—and belying up to that fantastic press box spread—regularly. It was now obvious that Bama did not have a great football team, or even a very good one, but we were enough for Clemson that day, 38-13.

On one of the famous Rice tours, we bused back to Atlanta to watch the Falcons on Sunday. A group of us caught a late plane back, and while waiting in one of the bays decided a small dice game would be a nice way to while away the time. We also felt one of the Atlanta Police Department's finest might take a degree of umbrage at this, so we commissioned one of our group—"C.H.L."—to be the

lookout. Shortly thereafter, those of us playing the galloping dominoes glanced up and, to our dismay, saw two Atlanta policemen looking down at our game! They were nice guys and just said to put the dice away—they didn't put us away. We obeyed posthaste, and when they had left went to see what had happened to our lookout. He was stretched out on the floor, head on duffle bag, snoozing peacefully. Scratch "C.H.L." for any future lookout duty.

After that it was pretty much downhill for Alabama. We barely beat Mississippi State, lost to LSU and Charley Mac, and, although we beat Miami (clinching a winning season and a bowl bid), Auburn shellacked us in the Sullivan-Beasley soph season, 49-26. Connie Frederick administered the *coup de grace* by running some 80 yards through the Alabama team for the final touchdown. . .from punt formation, yet!

We went to a bowl, though we almost certainly should not have (a testimonial to the drawing power of Alabama football and Coach Bryant). Ralphie the mascot was about the only one of the Colorado Buffaloes who did not run roughshod over us in a 33-47 loss in the Liberty Bowl in Memphis.

1970

With the advent of the new decade came the NCAA-sanctioned addition of an eleventh regular season game. This set up a dream match, two of the most storied teams—Alabama and Southern Cal—and two of the most storied coaches—best friends Paul Bryant and John McKay. The first of these extra games was to be the season-opener in Birmingham and the city fathers and alumni spared no effort to make certain the visitors from the Golden State were welcomed warmly, that their stay would be memorable. Sightseeing events were set up and the highlight was a big dance at one of the downtown hotels. The Californians had a great time.

The Trojan football team had a better time. The two lines completely dominated Alabama and the Southern Cal fullback, Sam “Bam” Cunningham almost got shin splints from running through the Crimson Tide. An oft-repeated statement is that Sam Cunningham brought integration to Alabama football (although that’s not absolutely true since Wilbur Jackson had already been signed and was a freshman at The Capstone that year). There’s little doubt he made it more palatable to those Alabama alumni—and unquestionably there were some in those days—who were against it. The final score was 42-21 and to this day I wonder how McKay kept it so close. Despite the terrific beating, it was the beginning of a great, albeit brief, series.

After that the Tide offense had a reasonably good year, but the usually tough Alabama defense was almost totally lacking, giving up 224 points. Bama had losses to Ole Miss, Tennessee (the first shut-out of the Tide in over 100 games to Bill Battle’s team), LSU and Auburn.

The Auburn game that year was a particularly bitter pill for Bama to swallow. Although the Tigers had far, far superior talent, Coach Bryant as usual had the better game plan. With Scott Hunter extremely sharp, the Tide zipped to a 17-0 lead over the highly-regarded Tigers. Bama was making yet another first quarter thrust

towards the Auburn goal when Ronnie Ross, the Auburn captain who had grown up near Tuscaloosa, made a great interception. In the second quarter Terry Beasley, the superfine Auburn split end, was knocked out of the game on a ferocious hit by Tommy Wade. But Beasley recovered and so did Auburn, winning a 33-28 thriller.

Despite being 6-5, the old Alabama mystique and appeal (not to mention a helluva lot of Tide fans buy tickets and attend bowl games, dropping big bucks on motel rooms and meals and drinks) came into play and Bama got a bowl bid. We were invited to play in Houston in the now-renamed Astro-Bluebonnett Bowl against Oklahoma. The Tide and Sooners were in quite similar positions. Both had (and have) great football tradition, but both were in down cycles. Both also had good young talent and expected better things in the near future. Many of the Alabama and Oklahoma fans became quite friendly, and the joking agreement among them was to meet again next year in the Orange Bowl.

Oklahoma had switched to the wishbone offense in mid-season and Tide preparation for the bowl game was the Bama coaching staff's first exposure to the triple option running attack. It was a terrific football game with Alabama appearing to have the best of it but never quite able to put the Sooners away. With the score tied at 24, Johnny Musso made a nice run up the middle, then threw a pass back to quarterback Scott Hunter to move the Tide within field goal range. Scott stood by the official, letting the clock run down, before calling time out to let Richard Ciemny—the Kansas cowboy—come in for the field goal try. Richard loved kicking in the Astrodome. He had already made one big kick in there, against Houston in midseason to give the Tide its final lead in a win over Houston University that probably clinched the Tide's bowl bid. But he didn't make this one. The seeming chip shot was a horrendous right-to-left snipe on a low line into the coffin corner, and Bama had to settle for a tie. To paraphrase the old country and western song, Bama fans must have been muttering, "Mamas, don't let your cowboy sons grow up to be placekickers."

That was a sad ending to what had been a fine career for Ciemny. And, like Joe Namath and Jim Krapf, among many others, Richard has remained among the staunchest of those who came from out-of-state to play for Coach Bryant and the Crimson Tide. He's an active alumnus, following the team and helping recruit from his home in the midwest.

HALFTIME BREAK

Until deciding on the format for this book, I had never realized Paul Bryant's fabled career at Alabama was so clearly divided into two almost equal sections. The arrival, the first championships and the decline of the late sixties being one half and totaling 13 years; the advent of the Bryant wishbone and the incredible 100 wins in a decade and three more national championships the second for the final 12 years.

I won't dwell heavily on any of this at "halftime" except to say that it is a measure of the man's enormous wisdom, knowledge and willingness to be flexible that he made this giant transition so successfully, anchoring for all time his position as one of the true luminaries in the galaxy of sport.

I think he felt after the 1966 season that he could relax, that a sort of inertial movement would keep the Alabama program on its high peak, that he had done the work of getting it there and now his reputation and the work of his assistants could carry it off without the total dedication and 20-hour workdays he had given it so long.

But nothing ever came easily or simply for Paul William Bryant. His good friend, Duffy Daugherty of Michigan State, once told him, "You may not be the best football coach, but you sure cause the most commotion!" Many changes—great basic social changes—were taking place in the world all around us. In his football world, Coach Bryant was faced with a new type of young person. His players, like others of the Sixties generation, wanted less restriction, the opportunity to have long hair and facial hair. They had a new morality and a defiance of discipline and the old order. There was also a change in size. Coach Bryant had won with the quick, small teams, but now he was losing to the quick, big teams. And for Southern football teams, of course, there was the coming of the black athlete.

The seasons of '69 and '70 left no doubt that the Tide program was slipping, and Bryant made some firm public statements that he, the athletics director, was concerned that the head coach was not doing his job properly; and the AD was determined to get the program back on track, even if it meant getting a new head coach. He was, however, emphatic that the AD did not feel this was necessary yet.

The coach took the AD's warning to heart. Bryant went on a personal fitness program in the winter of 1971. He was back on the road recruiting new and bigger people to come to Tuscaloosa. He took cognizance that many of his early assistants had gone, that a new cadre had to be developed. But above all that, he, the head man, Paul Bryant, took the responsibility for turning things around. His old work fervor returned in the spring and early summer and his own indomitable will began to seep again into his staff and players. But he still felt the need to do something major, something that would tell the world that the Tide had turned and that Paul Bryant understood, that he had made the transition.

Bryant was the first to admit that he was no great innovator. But he had a knack of taking something from someone else, modifying it, fine tuning it, and getting the maximum from the concept. He had done it with the split T and with the passing game. In the summer of 1971 Bryant invited Darryl Royal to be the speaker at the annual Alabama coaching clinic. He also suggested that Royal bring his top assistant, Emory Bellard, along. Royal's Texas Longhorns were tearing up the football world with their new wishbone offense, the product of Bellard's brain.

The Texans spoke to the assembled high school and college coaches, then were called into Bryant's office. The Coach was convinced that the wishbone, with its emphasis on hardnosed attack, was a trademark befitting the Tide's rise from the ashes. Bryant asked them to stay over in Tuscaloosa a few days, that he wanted his coaches to visit with them. Royal and, primarily, Bellard set up shop in a suite in a Tuscaloosa hotel and Bryant and his offensive aides—Sam Bailey, Mal Moore, John David Crow, Jimmy Sharpe, Jack Rutledge, Richard Williamson and Bob Tyler—brainstormed with the Texans, learning everything they could about the offense Coach Bryant had told them Alabama “was going to sink or swim with.”

Paul William Bryant was preparing for the second half.

PLAY-BY-PLAY ACTION: 1971

This was a watershed year for Paul Bryant and the Crimson Tide. His two previous teams had turned in six win seasons. The new season could hardly have had a tougher beginning.

The opener was to be with Southern Cal in Los Angeles. The year before the Trojans had administered as thorough a whipping as any team had ever given any Bama squad, and prior to the 1971 season Southern Cal was a popular choice to be national champion. Doug Layton and I were contacted by Tide Sports Information Director Charley Thornton and invited to come down to one of the early fall practices, which were draped in even more secrecy than usual.

We found out the reason for the secrecy when we arrived at Memorial Coliseum, which then housed the football offices. Charley and Mal Moore swore us to absolute secrecy, then Mal and a couple of the other Tide assistants gave us a shortcourse lesson in the mechanics of the wishbone offense.

I was surprised that Bryant would have practiced one way in spring training and then nine days before the beginning of fall drills make the decision to switch offenses. But the personnel was right for it and, above all, his conviction was there.

I could appreciate Bryant's fondness for the wishbone. It called for good blocking linemen (and no one ever put more of a premium on blocking than Bryant), the best one to be at right guard (John Hannah in this first season); three hard-running, hard-blocking running backs; and a nimble-footed, nimble-minded quarterback. That year Terry Davis of Bogalusa, Louisiana, an unlikely looking baby-faced junior, had emerged from spring drills as the slimmest of leaders in the battle to replace Scott Hunter at quarterback. Davis would never have made it in the old pro-type offense, but when

Bama switched to the wishbone he was head and shoulders above all others. In fact, he may have been head and shoulders above all other quarterbacks in the Southeastern Conference that year, including Auburn's Heisman Trophy winner, Pat Sullivan.

Behind Davis would be Musso, coming up on his senior season; Joe LaBue and Ellis Beck. All three could run, but the reason for their first team status was all would block the Statue of Liberty if that was the assignment from Coach Bryant or running back Coach John David Crow. And they'd do a damned good job of it!

After the assistant coaches diagrammed and explained the triple option to us, Charley took us to a projection room where we watched the film Darryl Royal and Emory Bellard had prepared on it. Doug and I really felt "in the know," but we also knew we were guarding a deep, dark secret. The canvas curtain around the Thomas Field practice facility was drawn tighter than ever. I'm sure Coach Bryant felt his only chance of beating John McKay and the powerful Trojans was to catch them absolutely by surprise in the Friday night opener. It was on that basis we headed west.

I took part of my vacation and went to California early. I had received an invitation to a sportswriters and sports broadcasters luncheon, which was held every Thursday during the season at a restaurant in downtown Los Angeles. It's hard to realize coming from a state where sports are *really* covered, like Alabama, that there are more journalists dealing with sports in Orange County than there are in the entire state of Alabama—many more! The luncheon featured talks by the head coach of the Rams, McKay, and a number of others in that megalopolis.

One aspect of the gathering I particularly enjoyed was meeting Braven Dyer, who had been the sports editor of the *Los Angeles Times* and who had written features in the *Illustrated Football Annual*, the first football magazine and one I had been buying for almost thirty years. I remember, too, that Braven Dyer once wrote a great lead after the famous Alabama Rose Bowl game of January 1, 1935. His lead was something along the lines of: "Open up that golden book that features Friedman to Oosterbahn and Dorais to Rockne, and add the names Howell to Hutson, and write them in crimson flame." I still enjoy rococo writing and only wish it was more available. (For you movie trivia buffs, Braven Dyer was married to Rochelle Hudson.)

He was still a very handsome, dapper man, and when I quoted his lead from the Rose Bowl game of over thirty years previous, he seemed to get a genuine kick out of a rube from Alabama remembering his prose!

Also at the luncheon I met Mike Walden, who did the the Southern Cal play-by-play on radio KFL. After exchanging pleasantries, we did a little information swapping, or at least that's what we presumed to do. Mike asked me if Alabama had made any changes or if he could expect to see pretty much the same thing from Alabama as he had in 1970. With as much innocence as I could muster I told him there had been no changes, that the offense and defense would be basically the same, and added that we hoped Terry Davis would turn out to be the kind of passer we needed to run the offense.

It was a great thrill to drive to the Los Angeles Coliseum and see it looming out of the distance in the early twilight. Doug and I had ridden the team bus from the hotel on Wilshire Boulevard. We didn't go right into the stadium. The team always arrives at a game site long before kickoff, and so we had several minutes. We spent it walking around the historic coliseum. We had seen Southern Cal and UCLA and Los Angeles Rams games from there. We knew of its Olympics tradition. Were it not for the original in Rome, the Los Angeles edifice would be THE coliseum. Finally we made our way inside. We entered the press gate, caught the elevator to the radio level, and looked down at the familiar scene—familiar from so many great sports moments on television, because I was truly seeing it for the first time. Little did I know—though I certainly hoped—that I was about to witness yet another great moment in sports for the storied facility.

To give you an idea of the thoroughness of Coach Bryant, not taking any chances whatsoever, he sent a manager to our broadcast booth some 15 minutes before air time to tell Doug (who did the pregame show) that under no circumstances was he to reveal that Alabama would unveil the wishbone attack that night. He said not to say anything until the game actually started. Probably the nearest station to Los Angeles carrying our broadcast that night was in New Orleans. It is hard to say how anyone could have contacted John McKay in those 15 minutes before kickoff to let him know Bama's plans, but Coach Bryant, as always, took no chances.

Alabama won the toss and took the opening drive all the way,

Johnny Musso giving great effort to get it into the end zone on a sweep around right end. Terry Davis was executing the wishbone to absolute perfection. One thing that struck us in that opening drive after so many years of the Alabama passing game was the Tide's first third-and-long (eight or nine yards) situation. This sure-thing pass of the past was replaced by the straight vanilla wishbone triple option . . . and it worked.

As the Tide had done in the Georgia Tech game way back in 1958, Bama took advantage of the surprise and managed to get a 17-point lead. Then Bama clung for dear life against the powerful Trojans, who were nibbling away at it.

The game included two of the hardest licks I have ever seen in football, both when Bama was on defense. In the second quarter Southern Cal started it's famed "Student Body Right" sweep with Sam Cunningham carrying. Steve Higginbotham, Bama's 165-pound left cornerback, rushed headon to the ball. Probably everyone in the stadium expected the 225-pound Cunningham to pound over Steve, but the collision resulted in Cunningham—not Higginbotham—flat on his back.

Robin Parkhouse, the redheaded defensive end from Orlando, had been beaten badly in the 1970 game, but delivered like a champion in his second chance. He played a magnificent game despite being knocked cold midway through the contest. He was chasing the Southern Cal passer, probably Mike Rae, and John Vella, Southern Cal's All-America tackle, got a blindside bead on Robin. Vella unloaded, a clean but nevertheless savage block, and Robin was stretched out totally inert in front of the Bama bench. I felt we had seen the last of him, but he returned and continued to play a great game.

Bama's other defensive end that night was John Mitchell, the first black to play in a varsity football game for Alabama. John performed splendidly that night. An image that will remain with me forever is of a Southern Cal fumble late in the game and an ensuing violent pileup. Rising above the pack and signifying Tide possession in no uncertain terms was Mitchell, jumping up and down, his right arm pumping joyously towards the Alabama goal.

No game of such significance could be expected to be easy, and this was no exception. Late in the game a Tide punt to Lynn Swann looked like a sure touchdown return. David Bailey, a split end

known more for his sure hands than his sure tackles, was the only man between Swann and six points. Bailey didn't make a great tackle, but he got in the way enough so that Swann tripped up. One play later the Trojans were inside the Tide 10 and the only question seemed to be would USC be able to make the two-point conversion for victory. However, Vella was called for an unsportsmanlike penalty, resulting in his expulsion and a drive-killing 15-yard stepoff. Bama still had to run out the clock. Fourth down and two came up. Perhaps remembering the last punt to Swann, Coach Bryant elected to run for it. Musso was hit in the backfield but made a tremendous four-yard run to sew up the victory, 17-10.

It was Coach Bryant's 200th victory. It was also just hours before his birthday. And the result was heard 'round the college football world. *Sports Illustrated* ran a color picture of Coach and Terry Davis. Full press coverage of the Friday night game in Saturday game stories and Sunday followups proclaimed "Bama Is Back."

John McKay had said before the game that he worried about the way Southern Cal had beaten Alabama the year before because he knew Paul Bryant had monumental pride. He was right; and his friend was able to win a big one.

During the game I happened to glance over at Mike Walden, the Southern Cal play-by-play announcer in the adjoining booth. He was looking at me angrily as Alabama's wishbone attack—so different from what it had been the previous year—continued to plague the Trojans. Walden knew I had, let's say, been less than truthful with him at the press luncheon the day before. At the conclusion of the broadcast Tall Paul, a black disc jockey from Birmingham, came into our radio booth. Doug and I and Jimmy Jones, our engineer, and Tall Paul did a victory dance, hollering and whooping in our elation. The Southern Cal color man opened the door to our booth and asked us to please hush. In truth, the press box is a working area and cheering is prohibited, but, heck, we are Alabama fans and were just doing what Bama followers all over the country were undoubtedly doing!

Doug and I poured a slight libation, then made our way downstairs to await the ride back to central Los Angeles on the team bus. We waited with a contingent of other Tide fans outside the tunnel where both teams emerged. Southern Cal players for the most part showered, dressed and left before the Tiders (who spent much

time celebrating before worrying about leaving the stadium). The Trojans were absolutely stunned at the result; and some of the phrasing and language regarding the outcome was interesting, to say the very least.

Finally Doug and I began to ease towards the buses and in the semidarkness around the coliseum I tripped over a small stake in the ground. I had a drink in one hand and my briefcase in the other. I began to stagger, lurch, dance, twist, turn, tour jete, and must



Engineer Jimmy Jones, color man Doug Layton, producer Bert Bank and I had mostly smiles during Coach Bryant's 25 glorious years as Tide head coach.

have covered a distance of 30 or 35 yards, managing miraculously not to fall—or even spill a drop! My gyrations were undoubtedly amusing to the lone spectator, Doug Layton, who fell to the ground, convulsed in laughter.

The joyful Alabama players began filing onto the buses. Sitting in front of Doug and me was one young man so happy he truly could not contain himself. He couldn't sit still; he kept raising his hands above his head and clapping; he shook his head in absolute sheer delight. It was Terry Davis, the unknown quarterback who had emerged that night as Alabama's wishbone engineer. He would be the first—and one of the best—to run the powerful Alabama offense of the seventies.

To say that year one of the wishbone was successful is putting it mildly. Bama rolled up 368 points that year. In the Florida game—won by Alabama 38-0—the ball went to Johnny Musso on nine straight occasions, most of them runs over big John Hannah, and Johnny took it the entire length of the 66-yard drive. He scored four touchdowns that day, all over Hannah, and Hannah was named Lineman of the Week—an unusual accolade for an offensive lineman. (But, of course, John was an unusual lineman.)

After Alabama beat Mississippi 40-6, *Sports Illustrated* ran a real good story on the Tide, headed "Pride in a Red Jersey." The author, who reported emphatically that Alabama had regained its lost pride, almost certainly took that theme from the remark of Tennessee linebacker Steve Kiner from a couple of years earlier. Tennessee found out a couple of weeks later as the Tide rolled over them 32-15. Alabama struggled a bit against Houston (whose Robert Newhouse put on one of the finest running exhibitions ever seen in Denny Stadium) and LSU at Baton Rouge, but romped Mississippi State and Miami to set up a dream game. Alabama was 10-0, Auburn was 9-0 (the Tigers were reluctant to add an 11th game) and led by the fabulous Sullivan-Beasley team. Pat Sullivan was freshly-announced as the Heisman Trophy winner and Auburn was on a two-game winning streak against the Tide. Davis, Musso and Company turned the Tide emphatically, a totally-dominating 31-7 victory for Alabama.

And so it was with high hopes that everyone headed for the Orange Bowl, and the game with Nebraska for the national championship.

Nebraska had been whipped twice by Alabama, in the Orange Bowl following the 1965 season and the Sugar Bowl following the 1966 campaign. Bob Devaney, who has no shortage of pride himself, must have been licking his chops. The Cornhuskers were absolutely awesome; Coach Bryant would say later it may have been the best college football team ever. The handwriting was on the wall early. We punted to Nebraska's great return man, Johnny Rodgers. Our best player, Johnny Musso, seemed to have perfect position on Rodgers for the tackle, but Rodgers eluded Musso (and the rest of the Alabama coverage) to go all the way for a touchdown. The Rich Glover-led defense held Alabama to six points, while Nebraska rolled up 38. It was a drubbing to remember, but it couldn't totally diminish the greatness of the season.

TIMEOUT

The trip to California to open the 1971 season was exciting even before the game kicked off. The year before the Jefferson County Alumni Association and the entire city of Birmingham had gone to great pains to make the Southern Cal contingent welcome. The USC Alumni Association was determined to reciprocate in kind. A very lovely evening was arranged at Universal Studios. There was a dutch bar and dinner in the open air under a very pretty, soft California evening sky.

Pride and I drove out the proper freeway to Universal. There is a giant parking lot there, divided into sections, and we saw two large lots marked by garnet and gold (Southern Cal colors) streamers, directing the dinner invitees.

Among those directly involved in the affair, the Alabama game was a big event. And even in the newspapers and on the sports shows on radio and television, the game was receiving good coverage. But whereas an Alabama football game—and particularly a game of the magnitude of Bama-Southern Cal—is a happening in Birmingham, it is just something else going on in Los Angeles.

As we drove through and gave the attendant a dollar bill, the perky young girl in the Universal uniform looked at us quizzically. "Are you from Alabama, too?" she asked. We answered that we certainly were, and she appeared even more baffled. "Are you coming all the way out here just for dinner?" she asked.

That young lady definitely must not have been a football fan!

1972

The Duke Blue Devils furnished the opposition for Alabama to open the 1972 season, and it just so happened that my oldest daughter was a student at Duke. She went to the game with me, proudly wearing a big Duke hat and waving a blue and white pennant. Several of my acquaintances passed by us and looked in amazement. All I could do was shrug my shoulders and assure them "Blood is *not* thicker than water."

Bama beat Duke 35-12 and started another pretty good rampage through the SEC until the Tide got to Neyland Stadium in Knoxville on October 21. The Tennessee Vols appeared to be handling Alabama rather handily behind Condredge Holloway (a Huntsville lad heavily recruited by Alabama), and generally inspired play by the Orangemen. Tennessee led 10-3 late in the fourth quarter, but a nice punt return and a couple of quick strikes and Bama had scored a touchdown, pulling to within 9-10. All of us in the press box and surely almost everyone else expected Alabama to go for the two-point conversion, either winning or losing by one point. Inexplicably—at the time—the Tide did not. Later Coach Bryant would give Pat Dye, now the Auburn head coach, credit for this decision. The reasoning, as explained after it proved successful, was that if Alabama tied Tennessee, the Vols would have to take some chances and Alabama might cash in on an interception or a fumble. On the other hand, if Alabama went for two and failed, Tennessee would almost certainly be able to use up most of the remaining two minutes.

Pat's prescience was staggering. Alabama kicked the extra point and then kicked off. On the second play, Holloway fumbled the ball forward and Mike Dubose (now a member of the Bama coaching staff) recovered. With the clock ticking into eternity, Terry Davis marched the Tide down to the 22-yard line, and then on a great

keeper play, ran it in himself, two Vols clinging to him at the end. Alabama won 17-10.

One of the sidelights of this game was George Mooney, the owner of Mooney Broadcasting which did Tennessee games, being kind enough to invite Doug and me to ride up the Tennessee River on his boat and dock at the pier right at the end of the stadium, about where the Knoxville World's Fair would be held a few years later. It is a great Tennessee tradition to take a boat to the game and Doug and I looked forward to it very much. The Mooneys had about 30 guests who had boarded at a landing some 20 or 25 miles from the stadium. We rode up the river admiring the magnificent fall foliage. It is truly one of the most breath-taking scenic trips one could make. The Tennesseans were very cordial on the way up, and fortunately for me I was scheduled to catch a plane following the game. Doug and Villeta Layton were going to go back on the boat and spend the night in Knoxville.

Alabama's comeback astonished and angered most of the 85,000 on hand. Doug said the trip back on the boat was not nearly so friendly and cordial as it had been coming up, but at least they didn't throw him overboard.

The Tennessee comeback was not the only excitement of 1972. Alabama defeated LSU 35-21 in Birmingham in a game in which Bert Jones demonstrated he had the stuff to become a great pro quarterback, which he did.

But all that was put behind when Bama met The Amazin's—the Auburn team that won any number of games it wasn't supposed to, including blocking two punts to beat Alabama 17-16.

Alabama had dominated that game every bit as much as Tennessee had earlier against the Tide. However, when Alabama scored its first touchdown, Terry Davis, the Tide quarterback, injured his hand. Davis was also the holder for extra points, but he went to the sidelines and Gary Rutledge was sent in hurriedly to replace Terry as the holder. It was a cold day and I don't think Gary was really warmed up. He did not handle the snap from center very well and Bama missed the extra point. No one thought much of it at the time, but it would turn out to be a big one. Alabama came back with a field

goal to lead 9-0 and in the second half put together a fine drive to add another touchdown and seemed to be firmly in charge at 16-0.

Auburn's offense had been completely shut down all day, but the Tigers got the ball in fair field position and went for a long field goal (an unpopular decision in the Auburn stands) to make the score 16-3. I believe anyone in the stadium would have bet just about anything that would be all the scoring Auburn would do that day. However, Auburn had worked very hard on its punt rush and had a play on that worked to perfection. One of the Newton boys broke through and blocked a punt; it took a perfect (from an Auburn standpoint) bounce; and David Langer scooped it up and ran it into the end zone to make the score 16-10. The Auburn people went into an understandable frenzy.

Thus fired up, Auburn held Alabama on the next possession and Greg Gantt again came in to punt. I said on the air that it appeared to me Gantt wasn't too far back. It turned out that he was not far enough back and Auburn turned in a repeat performance. It really looked like a videotape replay. With a couple of minutes to play, Bama could not pull it out and Auburn had one of the great victories of its football history. It was still another example of the number of close Alabama-Auburn games that pivoted on the kicking game.

Alabama went into that game ranked second in the nation, but even without that loss had almost no chance to catch eventual national champion Southern Cal.

The Cotton Bowl was anticlimatic. Alabama had a nice lead at one time, in part because Gantt hit a record 50-yard field goal. And, as has frequently been the case in Bama games against Texas, there was a controversial play (a touchdown run in which it appeared the Texas runner went out of bounds) that went in favor of the Longhorns. But the primary thing is that Texas continued its domination of Alabama in a 17-13 victory. The Texas win came against what was an apparently totally flat and disinterested and downhearted Crimson Tide group.

TIMEOUT

Different things drift back as one tries to recall three decades of wonderful experiences. Almost everyone who loves Alabama has the horrible memory of the blocked punts, but that is not my only memory of Greg Gantt. There was a night in 1971 at the Memorial Stadium in Jackson when the wind was blowing unbelievably hard from the end zone to our right. That night against Mississippi State Greg punted from one end zone to the other, 85 yards. Obviously with the wind!

However, at one point against the wind, the opposing punter's kick went high and we could actually see the ball stop at the top of its arc and come straight down. I commented that it was one of the strongest winds in otherwise clement weather I had ever seen. Doug agreed and observed: "We noticed the punting in pregame warmups, John, and Greg Gantt's balls just seemed to hang in the air."

With that I turned to him and he looked around at me. We both dissolved, trying to hide our laughter. I hope there might have been a fortuitous timeout then!

1973

The wishbone offense put a lot of emphasis on the offensive line, and in the early wishbone days Alabama had perhaps its greatest offensive linemen ever with the likes of John Hannah, Buddy Brown and Jim Krapf. For that reason, we asked to add Jerry Duncan, who had played offensive tackle in the mid-sixties, to the broadcast crew. The LSU broadcast crew had started using an on-the-field man and our producers allowed us to add Jerry. He would be on the sidelines with a special pack to converse with me in the booth. As a partial by-product of adding Jerry, we had gotten another pleasant addition to our group, Logan Young of Memphis. Jerry had become fast friends with Logan when Jerry lived in Memphis. Logan's family was in the private label margarine business and Logan's father, who had been dead just a few years, had been a longtime member of Vanderbilt's athletics committee. Mr. Young, who was from Arkansas, was a law student graduate of Vanderbilt and was at one time Coach Red Sanders' closest friend. Therefore, he got to know Coach Bryant when he was an assistant at Vanderbilt and with their joint Arkansas backgrounds the two became fast friends. Although much younger, Logan was one of Coach Bryant's closest friends for the last 15 years of Coach Bryant's life.

Logan, Jerry, Doug and I made a rollicking traveling crew and have many wonderful memories of following the Tide all over the country.

Logan is very definitely on the affluent side, to coin an understatement, and he has been known to make a wager or two, and not for light amounts.

The year began on September 15 against the California Golden Bears, who journeyed to Birmingham from Berkeley, and spent what has to be one of the longer evenings California has ever had. Although Steve Bartkowski was the California quarterback, Vince Ferragamo his backup and Chuck Muncie the running back, the

Bama defense swarmed and the Tide offense had a track meet. Final score: Alabama 66, California 0. Years later a friend reported being in the stands at Stanford that day and hearing a report of the Birmingham game from the public address announcer. "Playing late in the fourth quarter in Birmingham," he said, "it's California zero, Alabama six (pause) ty-six."

The next week we went to Lexington, Kentucky, for a game in the brand new Commonwealth Stadium. The stadium was so new that no telephones had been installed and the people from the independent phone company that operated there were working frantically to try to get all the proper lines in order for the broadcast and wire service and newspaper people. It was really touch and go.

It was for the Tide, too. Everything that could go wrong for Alabama and right for Kentucky did in the first half and the Wildcats had a surprising 14-0 lead at intermission. Frank Lemaster, later a great linebacker in the pros for the Philadelphia Eagles, played like



Although Logan Young had no official capacity on the broadcast crew, his friendships with Coach Bryant and Jerry Duncan led him into our midst, which added greatly to our enjoyment of traveling with the Tide. Here he's sandwiched by Alabama and Auburn, former Tigers' broadcaster Gary Sanders on the right.

a man possessed and seemed to be in on every tackle Kentucky made in the first half of play. Things did not bode well for the Crimson Tide, but again the kicking game gave Alabama an important turnaround. Bama received the second half kickoff, Willie Shelby taking it in. Shelby started up the middle, then went down the right sidelines just in front of the Alabama bench. Gary Yelvington threw a terrific block and Shelby went all the way, starting Bama back en route to a 28-14 victory. Although Shelby caught the ball at about the two yard line, the official Kentucky statistics listed it as a 100-yard return, and that's the way it remains.

Strangely enough, Alabama won the next week by the same score, 28-14 over Georgia, and again the game was not nearly as easy as the final score would indicate. And again it was Willie Shelby to the rescue. With just a few minutes remaining and Georgia leading 14-13 (having overcome a 13-3 Alabama halftime lead with a safety off a blocked punt, a field goal and a touchdown). But Shelby ran for 36 yards, leading to a Gary Rutledge touchdown and a 21-14 Alabama lead. Alabama got a break in the fading moments (an apparent roughing the kicker violation went uncalled) and the Tide put some icing on the cake when Randy Billingsley ran it in with only seconds to play.

Tennessee furnished the opposition at Birmingham's Legion Field in a nationally televised game on a perfectly gorgeous autumn afternoon on the third Saturday in October. It was a day of spectacular plays. Alabama opened the game with Gary Rutledge faking the inside handoff that had been Alabama's opening play in almost every game for two and a half years. However, this time it was a fake. Rutledge dropped back and hit a speeding Wayne Wheeler far behind the Tennessee defense for a quick 7-0 lead. Despite that dramatic start, the Tide and Vols went to the fourth quarter even at 21. It would be a fourth quarter to remember for Alabama fans. First, Robin Cary—designated by Coach Bryant as punt catcher rather than punt returner—not only caught a Tennessee punt at the Alabama 36, he also returned it 64 yards for a go-ahead touchdown. Not long after Wilbur Jackson made one of the most spectacular runs in Alabama history. On first down from the 20 Jackson started right, spun 360 degrees out of a would-be tackler's arms, cut back against the grain and raced 80 yards for a touchdown. Bama added a sixth touchdown a few minutes later for a 42-21 win.

Not nearly as it would be the next week, however. In a night game at Tuscaloosa, the Tide went on a rampage against Virginia Tech. Bama broke three NCAA records and numerous school and Southeastern Conference records in a 77-6 win over Virginia Tech. Nine different Tiders scored touchdowns. It was 70-6 with nearly five minutes to play in the third quarter and Bama playing everyone in a uniform. The only reason Greg Gantt played is that he was the kickoff man, because Alabama didn't punt that long, long night.

The rest of the season was pretty much a cakewalk, climaxed by a 35-0 victory over Auburn, and Alabama concluded the season 11-0. The dream game was booked for New Year's Eve in the Sugar Bowl in old Tulane Stadium. Bama was meeting the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame for the first time.

Because the regular season usually wrang me out, I missed more Alabama bowl games than I attended through my broadcast years. However, I was asked to do the Bluebonnet radio broadcast that year with Larry Munson, the voice of the Georgia Bulldogs, so I was in Houston December 29. I made it a point to come back through New Orleans to see the Sugar Bowl.

I had written the New Orleans Midwinter Sports Association, which puts on the Sugar Bowl, for a press pass. They were very kind in replying with tickets to all the parties, but said press demand was the greatest in the history of the bowl. Instead of a press pass I was given a very good ticket (45-yard line) just outside the press box on the top row in the stands.

Grantland Rice, my "tour director," got me a shared room at the Monteleone with an Alabama grad named George Kennedy, who owns a bar in New York. When I arrived in New Orleans I went straight to the Fountainbleu Motel, which is where the Alabama team was staying. Twilight was just settling in over New Orleans. The hotel, a six or seven story high rise filled with Alabama fans, was decorated with crimson and white pennants and bunting, matching the attire of many of the excited faithful. I went up to Charley Thornton's suite overlooking the courtyard and we watched from the balcony as the Alabama team returned from its workout at Tulane Stadium. As the players filed through the courtyard an impromptu pep rally broke out. Some members of the Million Dollar Band gathered their instruments and stood around the swimming pool playing the Alabama fight song. The cheerleaders

came out and began leading the crowd in the 15-minute rally. Windows opened, balconies filled, and Alabamians on hand cheered their beloved Crimson Tide. It was a stirring, memorable sight, part and parcel of what I like to think is the special excitement of college football.

Shortly thereafter I took a cab down to my hotel and went up to the room I was sharing with Mr. Kennedy. The first thing that greeted me was the sight of about six Bloody Marys that had obviously been sitting there since morning. The tomato juice had separated from the vodka, making for an unsightly concoction. At the time I did not know Mr. Kennedy. After I became acquainted with him the memory of those Bloody Marys was somewhat surprising, because from that time on I never knew him not to finish drinking everything in sight.

The room was on the second or third floor of the hotel. I had barely settled into it when I heard a distant singing. I couldn't make out the words, so I opened the window. Below me I saw a crowd of primarily Notre Dame students and fans winding up Royal Street. Finally I recognized the words: "Here come the Irish, Here come the Irish, . . ." It had almost a mystical quality and the Notre Dame fans gathered between Canal Street and the first block of the French Quarter and conducted their own impromptu pep rally. Again, it was a stirring and memorable occasion and set the stage for all the excitement of the next day. I went to the press party—which is a gala—at the Monteleone that night and partook of some good New Orleans grub, but I didn't make a night of it. I was in bed fairly early, testimony to the seriousness with which I took the upcoming Sugar Bowl!

The weather turned inclement the next day. I had been given a ticket for the press bus, which was to leave for the stadium a couple of hours before kickoff. However, in the confusion of New Year's Eve in the French Quarter, the bus was being filled by anyone who could get on, regardless of whether they had the proper ticket. I made it on to the bus, then settled in for what would be an unsettling trip. It seemed to us that our driver was making his maiden voyage in the New Orleans transit system. We headed out towards Tulane Stadium in the rain and got into the area of the Sugar Bowl. We could see the haze of light above the stadium in the distance. But the driver did not seem to know how to get to the stadium. It

was nerve-racking as kickoff began to approach. We finally got into the stadium and the driver began making inquiries as to where he was to park. I remember Furman Bisher of *The Atlanta Journal*, among others, screaming "Stop the bus, stop the bus!" Finally the driver did as we begged and we poured out of it and headed through the mud towards the stadium. Before the game began the rain stopped and it was actually a pleasant evening, although there was some dampness on the artificial turf.

Ordinarily I enjoy the musical talent of Pete Fountain, who was playing in the pregame ceremonies. However, this night I saw the Alabama team standing in the tunnel and I thought the Tide players might be getting nervous as they waited for the music to end. It appeared the ensemble was going to play interminably. I really think this affected the Alabama team that night because the first quarter was all Notre Dame. Once we had Clements, the Notre Dame quarterback, trapped in his end zone, but the Alabama tackler tried to take his head off instead of just bringing him down for a safety, and Clements ducked under him and ran it out to about the 10. Notre Dame led 6-0 and a safety there, leaving the Irish punting into the wind, might have changed the outcome. Bama finally went ahead 10-6, only to have Notre Dame return the kickoff for a 14-10 lead before halftime. It was obvious Ara Parseghian, who had gotten so much criticism for the tie game with Michigan State in 1966, was going all out to be reckless and chance-taking, all guns blazing, to win the game that night.

Alabama went ahead late in the game on Coach Bryant's favorite gadget play, halfback Mike Stock taking the pitchout and going towards right end before throwing back to quarterback Richard Todd, who took it in for the touchdown. Stunningly, the extra point was missed, leaving Bama's lead at less than a field goal, 23-21. One of the biggest plays of the game came when two Alabama defensive backs misjudged a long pass and Dave Casper, who went on to be a great professional with Oakland, made one of the finest individual efforts I've ever seen to come back and make the catch. Notre Dame took advantage for the winning field goal.

Alabama had a final chance when Gantt punted dead to the Notre Dame one. Two plays had the Irish still backed up deep, but on third down Clements dropped back into his end zone and hit tight end Robin Weber, who had not caught a pass all year, right in front

of the Alabama bench. Then it was just a matter of running out the clock. Although Alabama had won the United Press International version of the national championship, Notre Dame's title was earned on the field in one of the greatest college football games ever played.

We all know now of the dominance Notre Dame has enjoyed over Alabama, but I really felt that night that Alabama should have won.

I made my mournful way back to downtown New Orleans and ran into Tom Siler, the longtime excellent sports editor of the *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, and we agreed that we had seen a truly classic football game. We were both worn out and we brought the New Year of 1974 in with a toast at the Carousel Bar in the Monteleone. I went to bed early, but I didn't sleep well, tossing and turning and knowing that it *should* have been Alabama's game. But it wasn't.

1974

The Maryland Terrapins of Jerry Claiborne would furnish the opener for Alabama as for the second time in Tide history Bama traveled to Byrd Stadium in College Park, Maryland. We stayed at the Statler-Hilton and for some reason the air conditioning was off, turning the place into a highrise sweatbox. Alabama alumni had a party the night before the game and all the Washington dignitaries from the state were in attendance.

Maryland's team featured Randy White, who was supposed to be the greatest defensive lineman in the country and would later become famed as the anchor of the Dallas Doomsday defense. Randy did not have a great game against Alabama (although a linebacker whose name escapes me did). Alabama won the game, 21-16, and it was a tough one. Richard Todd made a big, big play, surprising everyone when he ran out of punt formation for a first down with Alabama leading 14-9. That led to an icing touchdown midway through the third quarter. Calvin Culliver had the most stunning run of the game when he burst up the middle, then past some Terrapin defensive backs, for a 73-yard touchdown.

Alabama coasted through Southern Miss, Vanderbilt and Ole Miss, then had a breather on the schedule. Florida State had the nation's longest losing streak. One Florida sportswriter, I think maybe Larry Guest of *The Orlando Sentinel*, had a column in which he predicted the scores of various college football games and on the Alabama-Florida State game he wrote:

Alabama ???, FSU ?.

Florida State's coach was Darrell Mudra, and he was trying an interesting experiment in that he spent the game in the coaching booth in the press box rather than on the sidelines. Our route to the Alabama broadcast booth took us past the visiting coaching booth and I noticed all the paraphernalia in readiness for Coach Mudra and his assistants.

I don't think I've ever seen an Alabama team as flat as Bama was that day. Florida State took the opening kickoff, marched it about 75 yards, and led 7-0. At the time I think Alabama fans were mainly—and only mildly—upset that allowing Florida State to score meant the expected shutout had been lost. However, as time went on that seven points loomed as possibly the winning points. At length we got a Bucky Berrey field goal to make it 7-3 going to the fourth quarter. Finally Alabama got something going, only to turn it over to Florida State deep in Seminoles territory. Coach Mudra made the technically correct decision to give Alabama a safety, then punt the ball away with a 7-5 lead.

Alabama, now on the verge of an incredible defeat, had gone into the game such a prohibitive favorite that there was no national betting line on the game. The bookies of Alabama, knowing the thousands that would be bet on Alabama regardless of anything, had accomodated it as usual and put up about a 34 point homemade line on Alabama. Prior to the game Doug had turned to me and asked if I had bet on the game that day. I had not, feeling 34 points was too much, that the team might be off its feed a bit after four convincing victories and playing such an outmanned team. We got a little closer to air time and I asked Doug if he had a bet on the game. He had bet \$100 and suggested I take \$20 of it just to help him root the Tide in. Somewhat reluctantly, I agreed.

As time out was called following the safety, I looked at the scoreboard and noticed less than two minutes remained in the game. I also remembered I had taken part of Doug's bet. I turned to him and said, "Doug, don't worry about a thing. All we need are six quick touchdowns." Knowing that we would gladly accept just a field goal.

The Florida State free punt was not a long one and Alabama got it back into reasonable field goal territory. Jack O'Rear completed his first pass ever for Alabama. And with 33 seconds to play Bucky Berrey was good on a 36-yard field goal. Bama had snatched victory.

As we left the press box and walked past the visiting coaching booth, I glanced into the command headquarters from where Darrell Mudra had almost directed the upset of the year. There were gaping holes in the wallboard. One of the Alabama sports information department student assistants told us later that as the winning field goal passed through the uprights the FSU coaching

staff had gone into a frenzy, kicking and punching holes in the walls.

I ran into Coach Bryant sometime later that year and asked if he had seen the holes left by the Florida State staff. He hadn't seen them, but he had heard about them, he said as he gave that hard, hard look. "And I sent Coach Mudra a bill for \$600," he said. I'll bet it was paid.

Bama rolled easily through the rest of the season, although there was some adversity to be overcome. Bama went to Knoxville with both Todd and Gary Rutledge injured. However, Robert Fraley and Jack O'Rear were outstanding in reserve. O'Rear turned in a particularly memorable play, a naked quarterback bootleg the Tide had never used before. Jack has never denied that it might have been a broken play that he happened to turn in to a big gainer.

We played Miami in Miami as the next to the last game of the regular season. Doug and I went out to partake of the stone crab delicacies. It was the first time I had ever had them, but not the last. They are delicious and we both put away good size portions of same. Alabama won comfortably over the Hurricanes that Saturday night to the delight of the large Alabama contingent, which had profitted greatly. Some of those fans had a big party Sunday morning



We tried to make the halftime shows live up to Alabama football, which means having a superstar such as Bob Hope as guest.

with any in the Alabama group invited to join in. Doug and I both quaffed any number of Bloody Marys and were late getting to the Miami airport for the return trip. As we started for the gate I suggested we had time for just one more cocktail. Doug protested, but my logic won out and we went for one more.

When we got to the gate the Eastern agent looked a little anguished. He had already boarded the standbys. We held out our tickets and he glanced again at his passenger manifest. "Well," he said, "there are two places in first class. Why don't you take those seats." He stamped and gave us our first class passes and we walked into the plane, peering back through the curtains partitioning our area from the tourist section in back. We casually and in superior fashion waved to our cohorts in the back of the plane as they were jammed in and having to buy their own drinks. We slipped into the comfortable front seats, ordered our complimentary cocktails, and relaxed. "Doug," I said, "let this be a lesson to you: The last shall be first and the first shall be last."

The last game of the season was against Auburn, and it was a close one. The Tigers could very easily have won it, but Alabama did pull it out by a score of 17-13. That completed a second straight 11-0 regular season record. Bama had won 43 games in four years, but had not won a bowl game in that span.

I had really felt—despite the record—this was not one of Alabama's better overall teams, particularly in the offensive line, and I was astonished that Alabama was made a heavy favorite over Notre Dame in the Orange Bowl. I felt Notre Dame's defense would handle Alabama's offensive line without too much difficulty, and that's about the way it worked out. Notre Dame won the game, 13-11, but the Irish dominated completely until Alabama completed a pass play late in the game to make it that close.

TIMEOUT

Bryant didn't hesitate to call on former players to help him with current team problems. And to a Bryant man such requests were tantamount to orders, not necessarily from The Coach, but from the person's own inner determination to do whatever he could for Bryant. They were, in effect, self-commanded after suggestion.

Thus, in the early days, Tommy Brooker would always help with young placekickers, Goobie Stapp would go to Tuscaloosa and punt to receivers in practice when Alabama was about to face a left-footed punter, and on and on.

A friend of mine related a Bryant request story. He was with Coach Bryant at the Palm Bay Club in Miami and they met Joe Namath for lunch. "Joe," Bryant stated, "you've got to help me with a young quarterback I've got. He's got a lot of promise, but his passing isn't worth a damn. But you can help him, Joe."

"I'll be happy to try," said Joe.

"I really think his main problem is that his hands are too small."

Joe was silent for a moment, then suggested, "Coach, there's really nothing I can do about the size of his hands."

"Yes you can, Joe," Bryant snapped. "Get on up to Tuscaloosa and work with him."

"Well, I'm supposed to be on Johnny Carson's show in a week. . ."

"Forget Carson. Get your ass up to Tuscaloosa and make a passer of that kid."

Namath said "Yessir." Later, when Bryant had left the table, Namath shook his head and said "I don't believe anybody but the good Lord can do anything about the size of his hands, but if Coach says go, I'll give it a try."

1975

Alabama would break its bowl drought this year with a hard-fought 13-6 decision over Penn State in the Sugar Bowl, but there was also a regular season loss to start the year before 11 straight victories were run off. The Missouri opener played in Birmingham is memorable as much as anything else for something I have heard only rarely and hope never to hear again. The Alabama team was actually booed by its fans going off the field at the half and trailing. It was certainly one of Alabama's poorest games in history with the Tigers from Columbia winning by a score of 20-7, but we said on the air that Alabama's fans were being "bush," and we meant it.

If that intersectional game was a catastrophe for Bama, its other was a catastrophe for the opposition. The Washington Huskies came to Tuscaloosa amid much fanfare, for members of both Alabama and Washington teams from a half century earlier who had played in the 1926 Rose Bowl were honored guests. Coach Wallace Wade, who had led Bama to that first bowl game, starting the Crimson Tide on the greatest bowl record in history, was also on hand for festivities, although he did not feel well on game day and skipped the rematch. He didn't miss much insofar as football competition is concerned. Whereas the 1926 classic had ended in a 20-19 Crimson Tide victory, in the Golden Anniversary rematch Alabama walloped the Huskies, 52-0.

Alabama struggled a bit against Mississippi State, but for the most part after that opening loss Bama was rolling.

That year the LSU game was in Baton Rouge. As usual, our plans were to stay in New Orleans, but whereas I usually traveled on one of Grantland Rice's buses to LSU, Logan Young had arranged for us to go up in a big fancy limousine. The limousine was fine, extremely comfortable and nice, but the driver left something to be desired. As a matter of fact, a lot.

We thought we had left in plenty of time. We ran into some traffic, which was not surprising, but instead of going in the back way, the driver very laboriously went into downtown Baton Rouge and then had to double back to the stadium. We ended up getting me to the stadium just minutes before we were due on the air, and only the forbearance of a lot of Baton Rouge policemen, who saw me with my briefcase and radio pass hanging out the window waving frantically, got us through as quickly as we did. Even so, I had to trot a half mile or so to the press box elevator, and that's not recommended for a man of my size.

Alabama finished its regular season with a 28-0 victory over Auburn, 10 straight wins, and a fifth straight Southeastern Conference championship. It was on to New Orleans to play Penn State in the Sugar Bowl. Penn State had a great field goal kicker, and it was a classic game with Bryant and Paterno having at it. I felt it was one of Coach Bryant's finest coaching performances because he realized he would have to throw the ball to win. Richard Todd was primarily a running quarterback to that time, but he had a great passing night (10 of 12 for 210 yards) and the Tide won a super game, 13-6.

TIMEOUT

Over the years my memories of Alabama-LSU games in Baton Rouge are bright with a lot of good times, both in New Orleans and on the trip to Baton Rouge, as well as at Tiger Stadium. I've always considered the stadium to be one of the most attractive. The groundskeeper does a marvelous job of keeping the turf in beautiful shape and also in decorating the end zones.

One trip I remember particularly involved a friend of mine whom I will call CHL. On the bus to Baton Rouge he told me he had gotten a sidelines press pass, that he was going to be a photographer's assistant. Maybe CHL did help the photographer carry a box onto the field or something like that, but I'm sure that was the extent of any assistance he could be to a professional photographer. During the course of the game we spotted CHL standing near the Alabama bench.

Alabama took a very tough 14-7 victory. One of Alabama's touchdowns was a beautiful keeper by quarterback Terry Davis. As he danced into the corner of the end zone I noticed a familiar figure dancing right along beside him. Sure enough, it was CHL celebrating the score.

This was the game where Johnny Musso and LSU's outstanding safety Tommy Casanova, were involved in a terrific collision near the Alabama sidelines, leaving Musso a little dizzy and with a severe toe sprain. He had only five carries the entire night. Once I thought I spotted CHL standing behind and chatting with Johnny.

In the bus going back to New Orleans following the game, CHL, who had obviously had a drink or two, proudly displayed a trophy from Alabama's victory, a piece of tattered LSU white jersey with the gold and purple shoulder decorations on it. He said he was taking it back to his daughter. I asked CHL if that was him I had seen talking to Musso on the Alabama bench in the fourth quarter, and he nodded yes. "What were you talking to him about," I asked. CHL replied calmly, "I asked him if he wanted a drink." Questioned further, CHL remembered Johnny had politely declined.

CHL and his buddy, 2-S, were part of another memorable incident in New Orleans. After the charter of Alabama fans rolled back to the Bourbon Orleans following a win over LSU, we joined

the throng of wanderers through the French Quarter. We stopped at a place that made gag headlines on faked front pages of newspapers.

2-S had one made in boxcar type that said:

BAMA WHIPPED THEIR ASS

He would stroll along, occasionally asking someone along the way "Do you know how the Alabama-LSU game came out?" If the answer was negative, 2-S would flash his newspaper and say "All I know is what I read in the papers."

CHL and I decided to have one made that would state our attitude toward Alabama's next opponent, Georgia Tech. We got the biggest type we could get. The man made a mistake in setting the type, but we kept it anyway. I won't say how the headline came out, but our battlecry the rest of the weekend was "Foosh Toosh!"

1976

Alabama opened the 1976 season with everyone naturally expecting the Tide to stay on the roll that had been gathering momentum for five years. However, in Jackson's Memorial Stadium the Ole Miss Rebels sprang the upset, a 10-7 victory that was due in great part to a fantastic barefooted punter and to a defensive end from Sulligent, who had not been offered a scholarship by Bama. That defensive end played a tremendous game against Alabama every time he faced the Tide which had spurned him.

We came back with two victories, lopsided ones at that, over SMU and Vanderbilt, and then went to visit the Georgia Bulldogs in the unfriendly confines between the hedges of Sanford Stadium. I drove over from Atlanta with Doug Layton and his brother, Dale, who had played at Alabama. We expected a tough game from the Dogs, but got more than we bargained for. The whole town of Athens and the Georgia student body was absolutely electric. They expected to beat Alabama. Even though Alabama and Georgia were not (and are not) regular opponents, the feeling in Athens is the same as it is throughout the Southeastern Conference: beat Alabama, even a down Alabama, and it has been a successful season. The night before the game was a difficult one for anyone in the Alabama motel to get much sleep. Georgia students drove round and round the parking lot, honking horns and throwing rocks at the windows. Some of the Tiders pulled mattresses into the hall in hopes of avoiding the disturbance. The Georgians proved there is no shortage of rocks in Athens as they pelted the Alabama team buses pulling into the stadium the next day.

But the most damaging licks administered to the Tide came from the Georgia players. The Dogs played an absolutely dedicated and inspired game, took advantage of opportunities (where Alabama did not) and took a 21-0 decision.

A small band of us Alabama partisans made our way across the

famous bridge at one end of Sandord Stadium following the game. We had noticed the crowd of Georgia supporters standing and cheering on the bridge. As we reached the midpoint of the bridge we realized it was like being in the middle of a battlefield, and it was filled with liquid. I remember seeing several pairs of women's shoes and other assorted articles of wearing apparel, broken glass, beer bottles, and so on. It was a scene of true devastation!

We went to the top of the hill to await a limousine we had scheduled to pick us up to take us to the Athens airport. A caravan of cars filled with Georgia students continued to parade, the passengers cheering to each other. Suddenly one of the car doors popped open and the passengers inside—student-aged Georgia fans—rushed to another car, also ostensibly filled with Georgia students, opened the doors and began pulling bodies out. Then ensued one of the damndest gang fights I have ever seen, between supposedly ecstatic Georgia students. There must have been 10 or 12 of them swinging, being knocked down, getting up, and continuing down the street. It made the Gunfight at the OK Corral look like the Ladies Aid Society.

One of my friends turned to me and said, "Well, hell, if the Georgia students are that tough, no wonder the football team beat us." They certainly did.

The Tide got back on its winning ways defeating Southern Miss



Being Alabama's football broadcaster probably was a factor in meeting some people I might otherwise not have, such as President Ford and Arnold Palmer, who played in a celebrity golf foursome that also included Coach Bryant. I handled introductions.

in Birmingham, then got by Tennessee in Knoxville, 20-13. Bama went into the Tennessee game with number one quarterback, Jeff Rutledge, injured. Jack O'Rear took over and had an outstanding day. Calvin Culliver scored the winning touchdown in the fourth quarter.

Two weeks later Alabama had to come from behind against Mississippi State with Rutledge and O'Rear having good days. The final score of 34-17 was the result of Alabama scoring three second half touchdowns after State had taken a quick 14-0 lead and led 17-12 at halftime.

Two weeks after that it was the game everyone had looked forward to. Bama was off to South Bend to meet an average Notre Dame team. Everyone in the Tide camp thought Alabama had a good chance to finally top the Irish.

The "game plan" for the rollicking crew of the Alabama Radio Network was to hit Chicago, where we stayed at the beautiful Ritz Carlton Hotel near the fabled Chicago Gold Coast. Logan had arranged for a block-long limousine to drive us down to South Bend. The car included a television set so we could watch another game on our return trip. We rolled out of the windy city on a nippy autumn morning, passing the steel mills and industrial sites of the south side of Chicago and Gary, Indiana, before rolling over the farmland into South Bend.

The Notre Dame campus is everything it is advertised to be. We made a brief walking tour through it and ended up at a small inn in the middle of the campus and just a couple of blocks from the stadium. We hoped to warm up with a cup of coffee. The inn was jam-packed, Notre Dame and Alabama followers mingling in crimson and green. We made our way back towards the dining room, a large room with a number of tables set. The hostess said that brunch would be served shortly and that we were a few minutes early, then asked our name. Doug was leading our group and said "Layton." The hostess consulted her reservation list and asked, "Was that 'Layden?'" She did, indeed, have that name on her list. We checked further and it was the name of Elmer Layden, one of the famed Four Horsemen of the Notre Dame teams of the '20s and a former coach of the Fighting Irish. We reluctantly admitted that Dougie Doo was not Elmer and went elsewhere for coffee.

The game was a great one, again one that Alabama could very

easily have won. It was tough from the beginning, literally. Notre Dame students poured out of the stands to greet their beloved team as the Irish made their way onto the field. Those students made it difficult for Alabama to try to get onto the field.

After a scoreless first quarter Notre Dame got two touchdowns before Jack O'Rear snuck one in for the Tide. The Irish added another touchdown before intermission and it looked bad, 21-7. The second half was all Alabama as Bucky Berrey kicked a field goal. Early in the fourth quarter Jeff Rutledge hit Ozzie Newsome on a 30-yard pass to pull Bama within three points. Late in the game Alabama moved it down again, threatening to score a winning touchdown, or at the least a tying field goal. Jeff faded back and probably 59,075 spectators, most of the coaches and players on both sides, and everyone in the press box saw Pete Cavan slip out of the backfield and run wide open to the Notre Dame goalline. Unfortunately, Rutledge didn't have the same viewpoint as those of us watching from afar; he was avoiding a Notre Dame rush and didn't see Cavan. Instead he threw over the middle and it was intercepted, ending Alabama's last chance. So once again the Irish had put the mojo on the Crimson Tide. Notre Dame had won three straight games—by one point, two points and three points.

We drove back to Chicago in real luxury, but also in deep sadness about the closeness of the loss. Although we were haunted by the mind's eye memory of Cavan ready to take the pass that would have given Alabama its first win ever over Notre Dame, it couldn't spoil the meal we had at Le Peroquet, one of the best restaurants I have ever been to.

That loss seemed to pull a struggling Alabama team closer together. The Tide was outstanding in running roughshod over Auburn, going out to a 38-0 lead early in the fourth quarter and finishing with a 38-7 victory. That earned Bama a bid to the Liberty Bowl to meet a very good UCLA team. Again the Tide dominated, winning 36-6 in icebound Memphis. Sophomore linebacker Barry Krauss had an outstanding game, establishing credentials that would lead to All-America recognition later. Of course, Krauss's performance in a later bowl game would all but obliterate the memory of his game against UCLA, in which he intercepted a pass for the game's first touchdown and turned in 18 tackles.

1977

Everyone expected Alabama to have quite an offense in 1977, what with the likes of Tony Nathan, heralded freshman Major Ogilvie, Johnny Davis and Steve Whitman running; the great Ozzie Newsome catching; Jeff Rutledge and newcomer Steadman Shealy at the throttle; and an experienced offensive line of center Dwight Stephenson, guards Bob Cryder and Lou Green, and tackles David Sadler and Jim Bunch.

The Tide did not disappoint in its opener in Birmingham, rolling over Mississippi, 34-13, and in the process amassing a total of 465 yards of offense. The Tide wishbone was ready to go and traveled the next week to Lincoln, Nebraska, for a nationally televised game with the Cornhuskers. This was our first visit to Lincoln and it was about as we expected . . . a large university in the wide open plains. We arrived at the Alabama motel late Friday afternoon and were informed that Nebraska was having a press reception at the VFW Club. Now the VFW Club may not sound like much, but in Lincoln it is something to see. We were told it was the largest such club in the world and it is tremendous. They put on a beautiful spread, including a dinner of prime Nebraska beef.

We wanted to get to bed early so we went out to catch a cab. We had to wait some time, but finally a very elderly driver in a very elderly cab showed up. He realized we were from Alabama and struck up a conversation. He told us he wasn't working the next day, but he would be happy to come by the motel and pick up us and get us to the stadium in plenty of time to beat the pregame crowd. In fact, he added, there would be no charge, that it would be a welcoming gesture to the visitors from Dixie. He was as good as his word, picking us up early enough that we had time for a quick sight-seeing tour of downtown Lincoln and the Nebraska campus.

The game will always strike me as a very odd one because Jeff Rutledge, normally a very conservative and pinpoint-accurate pass-

er, had five interceptions that afternoon. Take out any one of those and the result might have been different. I.M. Hipp and Rick Berns were outstanding for Nebraska, but even with the turnovers Alabama stayed in it until the end, finally falling 31-24. Ironically, those five interceptions were the only ones Jeff suffered in 1977. And even with that, Alabama outpassed the Huskers (Newsome alone had eight catches for 132 yards) and had greater total offense, 430-417, but the payoff is on points. It would be Bama's only loss of the year.

Coming back from Lincoln we had an incident where our plane to Chicago was delayed. (Doesn't everyone come back from Lincoln through Chicago?) I left the bar where we were waiting to walk around to the gate to inquire after the status of the plane. One of the guards in the airport called me over, and in all innocence I went to him. He snatched the cup out of my hand and made an elaborate show of pouring its contents into a trash can. "Don't come out of that bar with a drink again or I'll arrest you," he warned angrily.

The old man who had been our chauffeur was certainly hospitable, but that SOB in the airport wasn't. Hell, they had whipped us, hadn't they? What more did they want?

Despite the game and despite that beginning to the journey home, the flight from Lincoln to Chicago was merry and bibulous with a number of Alabama voices calling back and forth in the plane. Several of the top execs from ABC (which had telecast the game) were aboard and looked on us with mild amusement. At length, network producer Chuck Howard turned and asked loudly, "What the hell do you guys do when you win?"

As the plane banked preparing to land at O'Hare, a large tray of miniatures, some full, some empty, fell from my lap and rolled through the aisles. "Must be Forney's," some perceptive soul called out.

We hit the Windy City somewhat the worse for wear, a state that the freshening-up process at the Whitehall Hotel failed to cure totally. We had all been looking forward to a gourmet-plus meal at La Perroquet, one of America's best restaurants; but even their fabulous fare couldn't bring us to sobriety. Logan's date—a very attractive Chicagoan—looked around at us for while with expressions that ranged from stunned to aghast, then finally fled into the relative quiet and safety of the Illinois evening. This may have happened

when I led the group in a stirring rendition of the title song from "Oklahoma" (presumably rooting for the Sooners to unseat our conquerors of the afternoon). At that point the La Perroquet management made certain we knew where the exits were. Great restaurateurs they are; music lovers they are not.

Alabama got its revenge in Nashville against Vanderbilt, 24-12, in a game that was a little closer than expected. Although the Tide dominated statistically, Alabama held only a six point lead until Johnny Davis pushed in a wrapup touchdown in the final minute.

The next week wasn't any easier. In Tuscaloosa the Tide and the Georgia Bulldogs could score but one touchdown each, but Bama got a safety and a couple of field goals to take an 18-10 win.

That set the stage for the big game in Los Angeles against number one ranked Southern Cal. We planned our own big game with a side swing by the fleshpots of Las Vegas.

Logan and I rendezvoused in Dallas for the flight to Vegas. We stayed in a very handsome suite at the MGM Hotel. Logan visits the Nevada gambling center with some degree of regularity and I'm sure qualifies as a "high roller," because when we arrived in the suite there was a beautiful display of flowers and a large fruit basket awaiting us. Logan looked around somewhat disconsolately and said to me, "You know what this means, don't you?" I shook my head and said "No."

"It means their pigeon's back," he explained.

He was right. I didn't play much that night, but Logan got into one of the 200-400 poker games and I kibitzed for awhile before calling it a night.

We flew over to Los Angeles about noon the next day, where we had reservations at the swank Beverly Hills Hotel on Sunset Boulevard. Or at least we thought we had reservations.

My wife, who was flying in the next day from Alabama, was going to visit her father, who lived in Long Beach. Her father, Gil, was very ill at the time and could no longer drive a car. He kindly offered to let me use his Lincoln. So I left Logan at the LA airport and took the shuttle bus to Long Beach. After a visit with Gil, I drove back up the Harbor Freeway and managed to make it through the late afternoon LA traffic. I pulled into the Beverly Hills Hotel trying to look as dignified as possible (which was difficult) and as wealthy as possible (which was even more difficult). I strode to the desk, an-

nouncing "I'm John Forney. I believe you have a reservation for me." The desk clerk, who was a little on the prim side, looked over his list and said "I'm sorry, sir, we have no reservation for you." I was stunned. Was there a message for me? Was Mr. Logan Young registered? He rechecked his list. There was no reservation for Mr. Forney, no reservation for Mr. Young, and no message for either.

Here it was late on a Thursday evening in Los Angeles and I had no reservation that I knew of. No suitcase, either, because Logan had taken those with him from the airport. I explained my plight to the desk man, who was polite and understanding, but he offered no solutions. I went to the telephones to call a friend of mine who lives in Los Angeles. He told me he would pick me up and I would stay with him. Just then the deskman was kind enough to come over and tell me that frequently when they were overbooked they made reservations for guests at L'ermitage on Burton Way. He had just called over and they did have a reservation for me and Mr. Young had already checked in. I thanked my friend for his offer, but told him my problem had been solved.

Actually, I still had one problem. When I arrived at L'ermitage I learned the room cost was in excess of \$100 per day, very high in 1977. But I needed a place to hang my hat. The expense account I turned in following this trip was the only one my employers on the football broadcast ever questioned. And I could not blame them.

When I met up with Logan he told me that he had talked to his old friend, Ann Hamilton, who is the mother of the movie actor, George Hamilton, and that she was going to supper with us. I would be escorting her close friend, Phyllis Diller.

Mrs. Hamilton had arranged to have a limousine pick us up to go into the Bel Air area to Phyllis Diller's house, where we were to have a few drinks before going to the Bistro for dinner. Sure enough, our liveried chauffeur did appear. We picked up Mrs. Hamilton, then wended our way up into the California hills to Phyllis Diller's house. Phyllis was going on tour the next day and her hallway was jammed with large trunks. We had a couple of drinks there and then went to dinner, and then to a little after-hours bar where a real good piano player was performing. The pianist had been a co-worker with Phyllis in Oakland, California, when she first went into show business a quarter of a century earlier. We had a wonderful

time. A number of people came to the table to pay homage to Phyllis and I sat there trying to be as unobtrusive as possible.

We were invited in for a nightcap when we arrived back at Phyllis's house. At Ann's request, Phyllis took us through the house, including showing us the handmade carpet she had in her bedroom. There, too, was a vast wardrobe room. Clothesrack after clothesrack, particularly unbelievable when one considered that trunks of clothes were already packed for her tour. It rather boggled the mind.

I remember stopping by a rack of full length fur coats, gently feeling of them. As I rubbed the sleeve of one coat I exclaimed, "My God, that's the best feeling thing I've ever touched. What is it?" Phyllis Diller turned, smiled, and said, "Chinchilla, darling. Your third wife will feel that good."

With that we headed back to L'Ermitage with Logan paying the limo driver a couple of hundred bucks.

The next day we toured the sites of Los Angeles and then went to George Hamilton's house for drinks before going out to dinner that night. George was away on movie location, but his mother Ann was a gracious hostess. George's wife, Alana, was there and was totally bored by the Alabama invasion, recognizing us for the country bumpkins we were. She later was divorced from George, then married and divorced Rod Stewart. Mrs. Hamilton's other son was in attendance with his wife, a bouncy, cute Elke Sommer-type who is Lawrence Melchior's granddaughter.

We all went to the Beverly Hills Hotel. After quite a long cocktail hour, in which I, like Abou Ben Adhem, led all the rest, the rollicking crew finally had dinner. The next day I knew I probably had not paid my pro rata share of the bill and assumed that Logan had picked up my tab. I handed Logan a hundred dollar bill, saying "Hope this will cover it." Logan nodded and put the bill in his pocket. . . much to the amazement of the onlooking Wally Nall and Doug Layton, who had actually paid my bill! Oh, well, as they say, the rich get richer.

The game actually lived up to the trip, and once again Alabama was victorious on California soil. Wayne Hamilton had a couple of big, big plays for the Crimson Tide defensively, including one in the waning moments as Southern Cal bravely went for the two-point

conversion and victory. Alabama won 21-20 and was back in the national championship race.

Alabama cruised successfully through the remainder of the schedule, beating Tennessee, Louisville, Mississippi State, LSU, Miami and Auburn decisively. Auburn did have some plays to put on its highlight film, Joe Cribbs running 85 yards for a touchdown and Byron Franklin turning a short pass into a 74-yard score, but despite those uncharacteristic allowances by the Bama defense, the Tide turned in a 48-21 victory.

Alabama truly put it together in the Sugar Bowl with a 35-6 win over Ohio State, a game matching the two winningest active coaches in college football, Paul Bryant and Woody Hayes. The game closed out the careers of some great Alabama players, but also demonstrated some more talent that would be on hand in 1978.

TIMEOUT

Before the Alabama-Miami game in Tuscaloosa in 1977, Doug and I drove down early Saturday morning. We decided to stop at the Lamplighter Restaurant adjacent to the Moon Winx Motel for breakfast. The restaurant was not crowded, even though about half of it had been closed off by heavy, sliding cloth partitions. The hostess seating us told us (proudly) the Alabama team had stayed there the night before and would soon be having its pregame meal in the closed-off part of the dining room. She seated us next to one of the partitions and in a moment we heard the Alabama team and party filing into the adjacent space.

I was never privileged to hear one of Coach Bryant's lockerroom statements, but that morning we couldn't help but hear what he told the team following the meal. I wouldn't want to admit to eavesdropping, but there was no conversation at our table as he addressed his squad.

The deep, mellow baritone filled the room as Coach Bryant spoke in slow, measured tones. He reminded the team that penalties could be costly, that any fouling should be completely unnecessary. Alabama was a heavy favorite that day and the coach told the players they would win if they played their game, didn't get careless and fat-headed. Since Miami was an underdog, he reminded the team to be wary of "gadgets"—halfback passes, long crossfield laterals, fake punts, and so on. He went through a laundry list of them.

He said that Alabama always had class and that they were class people and should remember that regardless of what happened.

He asked if there were any questions and a couple of players (or perhaps assistant coaches) had some and he responded to them. Then it was meeting adjourned and we heard the chairs scraping. Then the coach's voice rang out: "Wait a minute, I forgot to mention one thing." Silence. Miami had a linebacker that year who was a 26-year-old Vietnam veteran. He had gotten a lot of publicity owing to his age and status. Coach Bryant's voice was stern as he said, "Now I don't want to pick up the paper tomorrow and read where we've made that linebacker an All-American."

Doug and I agreed then that the Vietnam veteran had a long afternoon in store. And he did.

1978

Alabama had one of its finest schedules ever, including opening the season in a nationally-televised game in Birmingham against Nebraska. It was Labor Day night and one could reasonably have expected temperatures lurking around the 100 degree mark, a great advantage for Alabama. However, it was a fairly cool, very pleasant evening and Nebraska was in top shape. And it was a great football game.

Nebraska got an early field goal and then Bama came through with one of the fine clutch drives in Crimson Tide history to take the lead for good. After holding Nebraska on about the two-inch line, the Tide marched the better part of 100 yards—primarily on the clutch inside running of second team fullback Billy Jackson—to a Major Ogilvie touchdown. The defense played the best game it would play during the regular season and Bama went on to a 20-3 win.

There were still plenty of tough games ahead. Three of the next four opponents were Missouri, Southern Cal and Washington.

Missouri offered one of those problems in which the Tigers had the mojo on the Tide. In two previous meetings Missouri had been stronger and better, winning decisively in the 1968 Gator Bowl and to open the regular season in 1975 in Birmingham.

Nevertheless, the rollicking crew of the Alabama Network, Messrs. Layton and Duncan and I, looked forward very much to the trip. We were scheduled to fly from Birmingham to St. Louis, then take a rental car to Columbia. We arrived in St. Louis very close to the rush hour, so decided to make our getaway to Columbia as quickly as possible to avoid the afternoon traffic. While we were successful in beating the rush hour drive, we were overcome by the usual late Friday afternoon thirst that seemed to be a weekly malady during football season.

We stopped at a tavern in a small town, populated almost exclu-

sively by the neighborhood crowd. They eyed the three of us in a not overly friendly manner as we moved into their turf. We were not discouraged. After quaffing down a couple of beers each in no time flat, we asked directions to the nearest package store. Someone asked who we were and we identified ourselves as the Alabama broadcasters en route to Columbia for the game against the Tigers. The people—mostly Poles, Czechs, Lithuanians, etc.—crowded around us and we had a nice conversation with several of them. In fact, we stayed so long Doug decided he could use a little something to eat. One of the sandwiches on the menu board was kielbasa, a Polish sausage. Doug read over the menu, then gave his request to the man behind the counter: "I'll have one of those keel-baise sandwiches." The counterman was absolutely baffled by the order, but one of the locals—with a hearty laugh—interpreted. Finally we were out the door with Doug's sandwich, a six pack, and several hearty pats on the back and wishes of good luck for the Crimson Tide.

Missouri unveiled a very slick sophomore quarterback named Bradley before the largest crowd ever to see a football game at Columbia, close to 74,000. The Tide started strong, scoring a couple of quick touchdowns on a Major Ogilvie run and a Jeff Rutledge to Rick Neal pass and a field goal early in the second quarter made it a comfortable 17-0. However, as sometimes seems to happen when things begin so easily, midway through the second quarter the roof began to fall in and things appeared to be headed the way of all other Alabama-Missouri games. In the space of about 12 minutes Missouri scored three touchdowns—one of which was a 69-yard run by the aforementioned Bradley and which was one of the finest runs I have ever witnessed—and suddenly at the half it was 20-17 Missouri. Indeed, the Tigers were threatening again when, fortunately, the clock ran out. So the Tide trailed by three at intermission on a brutally hot day in front of a large and very hostile crowd. The third quarter was tense until the Tide punt rush paid big dividends. The kick was blocked by E.J. Junior and Rickey Gilliland scooped it up and ran 35 yards into the end zone to put Alabama in front to stay. Tony Nathan and Lou Ikner added touchdowns later and the Tide finished with its very first, and very fine, victory over Missouri, 38-20.

Although this game was televised back to Birmingham by special

arrangement of picking up the Missouri telecast, we learned later that circumstances probably didn't hurt our radio broadcast. It seems the Missouri broadcasters had bent over backwards to be impartial in the previous week's Missouri game and the athletics director had been covered up with complaints. Prior to the game the broadcasters—whose description and account of the game were the only available on the telecast—were told in no uncertain terms they were the Missouri broadcasters and their broadcast had better come across as such. As a result, even more Birmingham viewers than usual watched the television picture while listening to our report.

Earlier that week I had run into a friend of mine from Birmingham, Frank Boyd, a devoted Auburn grad who had married Dot DeRamus, a devoted Alabama grad. Somehow or other they worked out in their marriage where they alternated going to Alabama and Auburn games and, remarkably enough, the marriage seems to have survived very well! Frank said something about seeing me at the game in Columbia, and I asked him how they happened to be going up there. It developed that Frank had a sister who lived in St. Louis. I told him that Doug, Jerry and I were going to return to St. Louis after the game and spend the night there before flying back Sunday morning. He invited us to a party his sister, Mrs. Pat Carnall, was having and gave me a detailed map to her home. He even called the next day to reaffirm the invitation. He mentioned that his sister lived next door to Stan Musial, so I craftily figured her home was not in the low rent district.

Shortly after leaving the beautiful Missouri campus for the drive back to St. Louis, we made a stop to call in a few wagers on the nighttime action. Doug was particularly enamored of LSU and backed that fondness with a rather strong bet.

We got back to our hotel, right by the large arch over the Mississippi River, and changed quickly to go to Mrs. Carnall's home in the fashionable St. Louis suburb. It was a very nice party, a seated dinner for about 35 people. Two other Alabamians were there, in addition to Frank's family, and the rest were St. Louisians. Even to the untrained eye, it was obvious these were some of the city's top people. For example, one man was a top wheel with the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. I was seated by a very handsome young man whose name I understood to be McDonald. One of the other people at our

table asked him how many people were working at his place of business and the young man replied "Just under 32,000." This was startling news, and I had to assume that this was not McDonald's Hamburgers, but McDonnell Douglas Aircraft, one of the city's larger industries.

Earlier in the evening Doug had asked our hostess if perhaps she had a radio that he could tune in on occasionally to check on the progress of the LSU Bengals, and I think she was impressed that Doug was such a devoted fan of college football. Later Doug was seated at a sofa, bending over and listening intently to the LSU broadcast, and muttering fervently things like "Charlie McClendon, you had better not let me down again," or "LSU, if you blow this one you've had it with me; you understand, you've absolutely had it with me," and other similar imprecations. One of the guests, a very patrician lady, stood by Doug for awhile, watching and listening in some degree of amazement. She saw me standing not far away and came over and whispered: "Is Mr. Layton quite all right?" I didn't have the heart to tell her the truth.

At any rate, it was a lovely party, and Frank's sister was one of the finest hostesses I have ever known.

After a long day we made our way back to the hotel, which had a rooftop garden restaurant. Naturally we decided we had not had enough to drink by then, so we made our way up top for a nightcap.

In the darkness of the restaurant high above St. Louis we were truly relaxed. We were overlooking the Mississippi River, which that night had a late rising moon creasing the dappled waters. Doug ordered his usual, Courvoisier VSOP, and proceeded to expound on the state of the world, its problems and Laytonian solutions thereto. Unbeknownst to us at the time, we were in motion. The room was one of those on an axis making slow revolutions. I think the maitre d' told us it took an hour and a half for the room to make a complete circuit around the center core of the hotel.

The maitre d' was very much with us, because as we decided to go, Jerry Duncan looked down to slip back into the shoes he had taken off earlier. His shoes had apparently been left on a ledge and our table, making its journey, was a long, long way from wherever his brogans might be. So Jerry and the maitre d' went threading their way among the tables, striking matches and apologizing to

customers. At length the search was successful and, believe it or not, we all retired quietly.

The next week was the final game in what had been a four-game series with Southern Cal. (I for one certainly hope the Tide and the Trojans will be getting together again one of these days.) The history of this contest is that Alabama has won in the west, Southern Cal in Alabama. Today was no exception as it was all garnet and gold.

An index of how things went for the Tide was Paul McDonald, the young quarterback for Southern Cal, fumbled a snap, only to have the ball bounce perfectly into his hands resulting in about a six-yard broken play gain. Charles White, the eventual Heisman Trophy winner, went 40 yards for a touchdown and the Trojans dominated first half play, leading 10-0. Alabama came out strong in the second half, Major Ogilvie making a great twisting run, then streaking away on about a 35-yard play to cut the lead to 10-7, and one really had the feeling Bama was in business.

However, more of fate intervened as McDonald threw a long, almost desperation, pass in the direction of a speedy little back named Kevin Williams. Don McNeal, one of the finest cornerbacks in Alabama history, was in good position to defend against it, but instead of making the interception, or even batting the pass away, the ball flicked through his fingers and landed in the arms of Williams, who took it into the end zone. Those were Southern Cal's final points, and they were good enough for a 24-14 win in the end of a great regular season series.

We expected to catch our breath against Vanderbilt, but the 51-28 victory was harder than expected, Bama not putting the Commodores away until fourth quarter depth began to show. Then it was time to pack for the longest trip we had ever made as Alabama broadcasters, indeed the longest trip any Alabama football team had made to that time. We headed for Seattle and a meeting with Don James' fine Washington Huskies team.

As this was a major trip for the Alabama Network crew, we, as usual, milked it for all it was worth. We flew to San Francisco for a stay of a few days. On the flight out Pride and I had talked to a young married woman who was a friend of one of our daughters. We ran into her later at the Stanford Court, a very, very posh hotel

on Nob Hill. She told us that she and her husband had spent the day around the courtyard watching swanky cars and limousines drive in, expecting to see celebrities. She told us that the longest limousine of all came in and they eagerly craned to see who the superstar was. Indeed, she had recognized the first person out. It was Doug Layton. What more of a celebrity could she possibly want?

On Thursday we flew partway to Seattle and got a rental car to drive through the great Pacific Northwest. We went past the memorable mountains of Hood, Rainier, and what would be the most talked about of all in a few years, St. Helens.

Although Logan Young was not a member of the broadcast team, he was thoroughly accepted as a part of the traveling crew. Logan is a very good friend of former Tide quarterback Kenny Stabler, who at the time was ringing bells at Oakland en route to being one of the finest quarterbacks ever to play in the National Football League. Logan stopped off and stayed with the Snake for a few days before going to Seattle. I had told Logan I would call him for dinner the Friday night before the game in Seattle. We were staying at different motels, Logan at the team motel, my wife and I at the nearby Red Lion Inn. (Also ensconced at the Red Lion were the Green Bay Packers, who were to play Seattle in the King Dome the day after the Alabama-Washington game.)

At the end of his stay with Stabler, Logan had borrowed one of Snake's cars for the trip to the airport. However, instead of leaving it at the airport, he parked it in a nearby garage and flew on to Seattle. We learned later that two weeks afterwards one of Kenny's friends called Logan to see if he had been the one who had borrowed a car from Stabler. Logan assured him he was. "Well," said the friend, "then perhaps you can tell me where in the world it is."

Logan told us that while visiting with Stabler, Logan casually mentioned that Coach Bryant had said that if they had been running the wishbone when Stabler was the Alabama quarterback "we'd have had to put another number on the scoreboard," meaning Alabama might have scored in triple digits with the Snake at the throttle. Stabler was incredulous. "He said that about me?" he asked Logan. Logan nodded. "Hasn't he ever told you that?" Stabler shook his head thoughtfully. "No," said the Snake. "All he ever said about me is I wasn't worth a bleep."

Logan laughed, then challenged Kenny. "When was the last time he said that?" Stabler said "He told me that all the time when I was playing at Alabama, but the most recent was after the Super Bowl," in which Stabler had been brilliant in victory.

Stabler also told Logan that Coach Bryant had called him several years earlier and asked Kenny to call a bright out-of-state quarterback prospect and do a selling job on him for Alabama. Stabler said he called the boy and talked to him for over an hour—at Kenny's expense—and the prospect had indeed signed with Bama. Then, Stabler continued, "I ran into Coach Bryant last summer and he said 'Kenny, you were never worth a bleep, and that little SOB you insisted on recruiting isn't worth a bleep either.'"

I called Logan late Friday afternoon at the team motel. Judging by his voice I suspected he may have had a cocktail or two, but I wasn't certain about it. We were still on for dinner and I planned to pick him up at eight. We arrived to get him just as the Alabama team buses were leaving for the ritual Friday night movie. I finally made my way through the throng of well-wishers to a house phone and called Logan. This time I knew he had had a cocktail or two.

When Pride and I got to his room the door was partially open. The first thing that caught my eye was some dozen glasses, covered with plastic wrap and each with a straw through the middle of the wrap, adorning the room. Some were empty, some partially empty, a few full. And Logan was piled into one of the two double beds, almost asleep.

While we chatted there was a knock on the door, which I answered for Logan. There was a room service waiter, staggering under the largest load of cheeseburgers I had ever seen. He looked at me with sweat pouring down his face. "Are you the gentleman who ordered 12 cheeseburgers?," he asked. I let him in and Logan blearily instructed him to just put them on the empty double bed. Each plate included a cheeseburger "all the way" and an order of hash browns. The waiter put down the two platters, mopped his brow, turned and said "I'll be back with the extra hash browns in just a moment."

With that we left Logan to his lonely feast and went out to see the sights of Seattle. Later we learned that because of a room crunch, Logan was bunking in with Alabama's Sports Information Director, Kirk McNair. Kirk reported the next day that Logan had

ordered 12 scotches on arrival “and must have liked the number when he got to cheeseburgers and hash browns.” He said Logan ate a couple of cheeseburgers and the rest went out in the hall.

Part of our Friday evening tour was a visit to the top of the Space Needle, and we repeated that trip for a wonderful brunch on Sunday following the game. We still have a photograph from there. Seattle is beautiful. It seems that from time-to-time one turns a corner and suddenly there is Mount Rainier, a breath-taking, snow-capped peak that dominates the landscape. Although we understand that the mountain is frequently obscured by cloud cover, we were blessed with sunshine throughout our stay. There is also an incredible amount of water all over the city, including right up to the stadium. Many, many people came to the game by boat. Regardless of how they came, they saw a stem-winding football game that afternoon.

Alabama finally won a tough, tough one by a 20-17 margin. Alabama attacked primarily by ground (Alabama attempted only nine passes, completed only three, although one was for a touchdown to tight end Rick Neal). But the Alabama ground game, featuring Major Ogilvie and Tony Nathan, did well. Washington was most effective through the air. The most memorable play of the game was an incomplete pass. A Washington man was wide open—a Tide defender had slipped down—but he dropped a sure touchdown pass.

We tried very hard not to make any criticism of officials on the broadcast, but there was one flagrant miscall in that game and I commented “Sometimes it’s hard to realize how really far away from home you are.” And, I confess, that’s pretty much the way I felt.

The rest of the season was relatively easy. We beat Florida and Garo Ypremian, and then with Tim Travis twice scoring touchdowns on end-arounds—including one in which the ball was fumbled, but bounced right back into his hands with no loss of step—Tennessee was conquered in Knoxville. Auburn had its terrific threesome of Joe Cribbs, James Brooks and William Andrews, but never all three at once, thank goodness, and Cribbs had a fantastic afternoon. But so did Major Ogilvie for Alabama. It was a very tight game for three quarters, but Alabama broke it open in the final stanza with a 39-yard field goal by Alan McElroy and a beautiful 20-yard keeper play by Steadman Shealey.

That set the stage for one of the real classics: Alabama vs. Penn State in the Sugar Bowl.

State had Chuck Fusina at quarterback and a couple of great runners in Matt Suhey and Mike Guman. Alabama countered with Tony Nathan, who led the way offensively for Bama with 127 yards. But no one remembers this game for the offensive performers. It was defense, defense, defense, on the part of both teams.

I don't have to remind Tide followers of the magnificence of the Alabama defense in the fourth quarter. Fusina had completed a pass to the great little Penn State wideout, Scott Fitzkee, who took it at about the one or two yardline and seemingly had only to step into the end zone for the touchdown. But Don McNeal made an incredible recovery and stopped Fitzkee on about the one. That led to one of the biggest moments in storied Alabama football history. Led by Barry Krauss, Byron Braggs, Marty Lyons, Rich Wingo and Murray Legg, the Tide held against two Penn State dives. (The fourth down play is immortalized in a great painting by Dan Moore, and it is no exaggeration to say no Alabama fan should be without one.)

THIRD QUARTER BREAK

It's really hard to say how much my acquaintanceship with Coach Bryant meant to me personally. I certainly loved him and I think he felt the same way about me.

One of my fondest memories is of the final television playback show of the 1961 season, in which Alabama had been assured of the national championship. Before we went on the air I happened to see that among the many notations on his familiar yellow legal pad was "Real Pro." I had no idea of what he had in mind, but as we were wrapping up the show he looked around at me and patted me on the shoulder and said, "John, I want you to know I've enjoyed it. You are a real pro."

I know that initially he had had some reservations about my doing the weekly show with him, and it was most gratifying to receive that public pat on the back from him.

I had to give up the show for business reasons. Our agency was handling the Auburn playback show and, of course, as a member of the agency it was too awkward to work for another agency's talent. I told Robert "Preacher" Franklin of Coca-Cola that I was going to have to give it up. The reason I told Preacher first was that was the summer that Coach Bryant had fainted during a lecture at Pepperdine College, scaring everyone to death in Alabama. When he returned to Alabama he got word that I was going to leave the show and I heard that he was upset. I heard wrong: he was mad as hell!

I called him and he was somewhat on the cool side, but I told him I would like to come down and give him the full story in person. He asked me if I could come down the morning of July 4, and of course I said yes. He set the time at 7 a.m.

I arose at 5 and drove down to the athletics department. (This was before Memorial Coliseum was built and his office was in the old gym.) When I arrived in his office I could see that he had already been there for awhile, going through his mail.

I told him the total background of the agency situation and why I felt I had to quit. He listened patiently. When I finished I could tell his feelings were hurt, but he also understood the spot I was in. As was his wont, he could not have been nicer or more understanding.

At his suggestion we walked over to the drug store and had breakfast together. I returned to Birmingham feeling like a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders. It had been done so by a big man in every sense of the word.

PLAY-BY-PLAY ACTION: 1979

The 1979 season began with a renewal of one of the fabled Southern football series, Georgia Tech hosting Alabama in a nationally-televised game. There was a lot of poignancy in going to Atlanta, but with the weakness of the Yellow Jackets those great games of some 15 years earlier were just a memory. E.J. Junior got a good start on his quest for All-America that senior year by intercepting a Georgia Tech pass and returning it 59 yards for a touchdown. Those were the first points of 383 the Tide would roll up that season.

The next week against Baylor was the clue that Alabama did have an exceptional team in the making. The Bears were supposed to be very representative of the Southwest Conference. Alabama annihilated them 45-0, shutting down the efforts of their great running back, Walter Abercrombie.

The next week Alabama rolled over Vanderbilt, 66-3, in an awesome offensive display against one of Vanderbilt's weakest teams. The Commodores would make a change in their athletic program following that season. The previous week Vanderbilt had been the victim of a stunning upset at the hands of The Citadel. Leaving Nashville late that afternoon following the game I passed by a Vanderbilt fraternity house. A hastily hand-lettered banner had been placed across the front:

"That's all right 'Bama . . . Just wait 'til you play The Citadel!"

A couple of weeks later at Florida Field in Gainesville, Alabama rolled over the Gators, 40-0, getting 22 first downs and 454 yards total offense to Florida's three first downs and 66 yards in total offense. It was an awesome thing to watch. The highlight of the day, and one of the highlights of the season, was Don Jacobs' cutback run on a quarterback keeper on a 73-yard scoring play.

I had flown down with some friends in a private plane, and by far the most exciting thing of that day came on the return flight. We were winging back in the calm of dusk when all of a sudden the door on the co-pilot's side of the aircraft popped open. The pilot did a good job of getting it in shape. Dazzling Doug Layton (who had a pilot's license and who has flown extensively), was sitting in the co-pilot's seat. He managed to get the door closed and we eased our way gingerly back to Birmingham.

The stars must have been bad for the broadcast crew that weekend. Dougie had to keep our small plane together, while Jerry Duncan had an adventure of another kind in Birmingham.

Jerry went to the airport to catch a flight to Gainesville and, routinely, threw his travel bag on the conveyor belt to go through the X-ray machine. As our colleague strolled through the passenger checkpoint, bells began to ring, whistles blow, and security people quickly surrounded our on-the-field announcer. This time he was on the spot.

A week or so earlier Jerry had gone hunting and had put a small pistol in his shaving bag. That morning, without checking or thinking, he had thrown the same kit into his bag for the trip to Gainesville. He was hustled into a room by security officials. About all he had time to do, he reported later, was to say in his slow, North Carolina drawl, "Just what the hell is going on. . ."

The security people said the FBI was on its way and would let him know what was going on. Jerry proffered identification, his press ticket and other assorted credentials, but to no avail. The FBI men were cold-eyed and grim when they arrived. Jerry told them they were welcome to keep the gun, but that he had to get on that plane to Gainesville. The FBI man said, "We're keeping the gun all right, and we're also keeping you."

In desperation, Jerry chanted a litany of whom he knew and, more importantly, who knew him. Coach Bryant, a player friend, and a banker led the list. The FBI listened, but didn't see a damn thing humorous about Jerry's story or his pleas.

His plane for the connection to Gainesville left without him. So did several others. Finally, he was free to continue his trip. Unquestionably, Jerry looks much more like a country guy from Sparta, North Carolina, than a would-be plane hijacking terrorist . . . but you couldn't prove that by the FBI.

He regaled us with the story when he got to Gainesville and we all got a great kick out of it. There were suggestions that he grow a beard and wear Castro-style dungarees. Someone asked if the gun had been returned to him, and Jerry said he had not. (For the benefit of those who think the FBI sees the humor in such incidents or is easily forgiving, he *still* has not gotten it back.)

Sometime that weekend Coach Bryant heard the story and doubled up laughing. He got with Jerry for a first person report while still laughing at Jerry's problem. When Jerry said he told the FBI that Coach Bryant was a friend of his, the big man's face turned from laughter to a scowl and he roared, "You did what? Why the hell did you give 'em my name."

For sure that weekend, Pistol Packin' Jerry became Sweet, Meek Geraldine!

There was a not-so-humorous incidence the next week against Tennessee in Birmingham. It looked as if the Big Orange was going to stage one of the great upsets as the Vols leaped to a 14-0 lead and took a 17-7 lead at halftime. Bama was really lucky to be that close. The Vols gambled on a pass play and Alabama intercepted it just before halftime. Then Steadman Shealy hit Tim Travis with a touchdown pass to give Alabama a little momentum going into intermission. Bama came out and took charge in the third quarter with Major Ogilvie getting a couple of touchdowns and putting Alabama out front to stay, with the final score being 27-17.

The LSU game that year in Baton Rouge was played in an absolute deluge, pouring down cats, dogs, and other assorted animals. The field was a morass, and fortunately for the Tide Alan McElroy was able to make good on a field goal. Bama kept its season unbeaten with a 3-0 victory over the Bengals. Although any time the score is that close it is possible to lose, this game was certainly the most lopsided 3-0 game in history. The game was played almost entirely on the LSU side of the field, but the nasty conditions just made scoring next to impossible.

That year I had decided to do a highlight tape of the season, and with the help of some friends put together all but about eight minutes of a 60-minute tape following the Miami game, the 10th on the schedule. Alabama was undefeated going into the Auburn game, but the Tigers had a very good football team that year and it was destined to be a close game. I had talked to Ed Boutwell of Boutwell

Studios and told him that if Alabama beat Auburn I would meet him at his studio at 6 o'clock Sunday morning and we would complete the tape and begin having dubs made for shipment to stores.

It was a truly great football game with Cribbs and Brooks having great afternoons for Auburn, Steve Whitman, Steadman Shealy and Major Ogilvie for Alabama. Going into the fourth quarter Alabama led the Tigers by a score of 17-12, but Charlie Trotman, the Auburn quarterback, steered his team down field and hit Mark Robbins with a touchdown pass to put the Tigers ahead, 18-17. Auburn was unsuccessful in its two-point conversion try, so Alabama could win it with a field goal.

Auburn's defense had been getting stronger and I remember thinking to myself that I probably wouldn't have to get up early Sunday morning because it looked like 18-17 might hold. Steadman Shealy then began to direct the Tide on a drive that truly showed how much Bama wanted that undefeated season and national championship. Steadman hit a key pass, then Whitman made a great rush to get the Tide in field goal position. However, on a keeper play to the right side, Steadman took it into the end zone. A two-point conversion made it 25-18 and Alabama had its 11-0 season.

The Tide capped off the season with a 24-9 victory over Arkansas in the Sugar Bowl as Major Ogilvie had a super day. It was another national championship year for Bama with the school's first ever 12-0 season.

TIMEOUT

On most of our trips to Baton Rouge we made a weekend of it, including, of course, a stay in New Orleans. The primary purpose, naturally, was to soak up local color and psyche ourselves up properly for the Saturday night broadcast from "Deaf Valley." Now that no bolt of lightning has struck me after that statement, I will continue the narrative.

Usually Doug's lovely wife, Villeta, made the trip with him, but this particular year she stayed home and Doug was left to his own devices without the cool and moderating influence of Villeta.

There were six of us who started the weekend out with a long, leisurely Friday lunch at Antoine's: Doug, Jerry Duncan, Logan Young, Grantland Rice, one of Grantland's vice presidents in the travel business Debbie Morse, and me. We ordered a couple of rounds of drinks and the alert Antoine's waiters no doubt spotted us for the "rubes" we were. They volunteered to order hors d'oeuvres and lunches for all of us and that it would be a meal to remember. It was every bit of that and we concluded it with some of Layton's favorite, Courvoisier VSOP. Surprisingly, the bill didn't even come to \$300 . . . it was only \$296.

That sort of set the tenor of the weekend. Logan invited us all to a cocktail party in his suite in the Marie Antoinette (we really needed that). Logan had some friends coming in from Memphis and one of them, Hal Gerber, a prominent lawyer there, was staying in the suite with him. At the appointed time we began to wend our way from our motel to the Marie Antoinette through the crowded streets of the French Quarter. Along the way Dazzling Doug, who was weaving perhaps excessively (owing to the crowd, no doubt), missed a step and fell into one of the streets that bisect Royal. I still remember him looking up, smiling, the ancient cobblestones framing his head and face.

Without further complication we made it to the cocktail party, purposely made it brief, and then went out to dinner and turned in early.

Doug was sleeping soundly, deservedly and naturally so, when he was awakened by his roommate, a single gentleman who nevertheless shall remain anonymous. It seemed that this

aforementioned single gentleman had met a lady of great intellectual depth and perception who had agreed to go back to the motel room with him to discuss matters of importance on both the national and international scene. When his roommate explained to Doug that perhaps these matters were best discussed a deux, Doug gallantly rose from the bed, dressed, and went out into the late New Orleans night. Sitting in Jackson Square, Doug watched the dawn come up, feeding the pigeons and wondering why on earth Villeta was not along to protect him from life's many vicissitudes. Doug finally concluded that he desperately needed at least an hour or two more sleep, and figured there had to be some space in Logan's suite. He made his way to the Marie Antoinette, talked the night clerk out of a key, and went in. Mr. Gerber was asleep on one side of a king-size bed, so Doug slid into the other side, pulled the covers up, and went to sleep.

Sometime during the early morning hours, Logan walked through the room, tip-toeing so as not to wake Mr. Gerber. Logan reported later he saw a shock of red hair peeking from beneath the covers and was shocked to think that Mr. Gerber had a woman in bed with him. Logan hurried back to his room to await the departure of the guest.

When Mr. Gerber awoke he was no doubt more surprised than Logan had been to see his bedmate. Doug also opened an eye about that time. Never at a loss, the Dazzler stuck out a hand and said, "Hello, I'm Doug Layton." Mr. Gerber, good sport that he was, was able to laugh it all off.

As was often the case on such trips, the game that night was anticlimactic.

1980

A businesslike victory over Georgia Tech started the 1980 season off well, but that win was followed by a wild and wooly contest at Mississippi Memorial Stadium in Jackson. John Fourcade of the Ole Miss Rebels had a hot hand that day and punctured the Tide defense for 35 points, the most scored against the Tide since the Nebraska national champs had scored 38 in the Orange Bowl nearly a decade earlier. The Alabama defensive coaches had red faces, but the offensive coaches could only beam. The Tide racked up 59 points to score victory number two of the season. The total of 94 points was, I'm sure, the modern day record for any contest in which an Alabama team participated.

Bama seemed to be getting stronger and stronger, racking up Vanderbilt 44-0 and following with a 45-0 victory over Kentucky in Birmingham.

Next the Tide traveled to the outskirts of Manhattan to take on a resurgent Rutgers team at the Meadowlands. This was the first time the Tide had performed in the East since the Philadelphia Liberty Bowl way back in 1959, and a good number of Tide fans invaded Gotham. Needless to say, we were in that number. The Meadowlands, Sonny Werblin's new complex in the Jersey marshes, is one of the prettiest sports edifices I've ever seen, and the press facilities were certainly among the best. The stadium is designed strictly for football and is a great place to watch a game. I'm not sure whether the Alabama football team thought it was a great place to *play* a game, because Rutgers gave the Tide all it could handle that afternoon. Bama finally escaped with a 17-13 win, in part because of a touchdown-saving shoestring tackle by Mike Clements on a Rutgers punt return late in the game. Earl Collins was hurt in that game and it was feared that he had a very serious injury. Fortunately the original diagnosis was in error and he was able to return to the field in a short time.

The Tide was glad to get out of the mysterious East with a victory. In a driving deluge in Knoxville the next week, Bama beat Tennessee with some ease, 27-0. The Tide scored on about the last play of the game and drew a gigantic chorus of boos for pushing over a nose-rubbing touchdown against the Vols. Coach Bryant never intentionally ran up the score on an opponent, but he didn't expect his players to quit playing hard, either.

When Southern Mississippi fell the next week Alabama had extended the nation's longest winning streak (and the longest in Bama history) to 28 games. That set the stage for one of Mississippi State's greatest victories in history, in Jackson on November 8. Alabama just simply could not get its offense on track, although Mississippi State's defense—led by Johnie Cooks—had something to do with that. State dominated play in the first two quarters, but Alabama took a 3-0 halftime lead when our great little Korean kicker, Peter Kim, hit a 49-yard field goal on the last play of the half.

The Bulldogs came back in the second half and got two field goals out of Dana Moore, and seemed to have the determination it would take to hang on to that 6-3 lead. Late in the game Alabama got the ball and began moving towards the State goalline. In a cacophony of cowbells and confusion, Alabama was rattled and unable to punch it in with its goalline offense. The officials refused to entertain Don Jacobs' plea for a timeout (Alabama was out of timeouts) to quieten the crowd. I agree with the decision of the officials not to stop the clock for Alabama. It seemed to me Alabama's offense just couldn't get things under way the way the Alabama offense of yore did in similar clutch situations. I might add that Coach Bryant didn't agree with the decision by the referee. He scratched that particular man from ever working another Alabama game in which he coached.

So the Bulldogs pulled off a tremendous upset. Since that time I suppose I've seen 100,000 bumper stickers that say "I Was There: Mississippi State 6, Alabama 3," which is rather remarkable when you consider only a little over 50,000 people were in the stadium! It's never pleasant to lose, but considering the dominance the Tide has had over the Bulldogs all these years it wasn't too difficult to congratulate Bob Hartley, who served as Mississippi State's sports information director for many, many years and who was always most gracious in defeat.

After beating LSU and a very fine sophomore quarterback, Alan

Risher, 28-7, the Tide came to Birmingham for a game I and every other Alabama fan had waited on for years . . . playing Notre Dame on our home turf. The Irish weren't too good that year, but on that day neither was Alabama. The Tide offensive game was ineffective to say the least. A turnover near the goal line was costly as Notre Dame took it and cashed it in, then held on for a 7-0 win that snapped a 53-game Alabama scoring streak. Notre Dame line-backer Bob Crable played a great game. Every time we went wide it seemed he was there like a staunch sentinel, waiting to slap the ball carrier down. All in all, it was a most frustrating late afternoon for the nationally-televised game. One felt that Alabama was the better team, but that particular day the Irish continued their dominance over Bama. I was impressed with Notre Dame in great part because they brought so many fans for a game that was on national television. They made their presence known, too. They seemed to me to be damn good sports and they praised Alabama. But I guess that was easy to do since the Tide had treated them so kindly.

Even the 34-18 victory over Auburn could not completely assuage the heartbreak of Alabama not being able to scotch the Irish that year.

The season ended with a tremendous 30-2 Cotton Bowl win over a fine Baylor team, one of the best Tide efforts in a long time. Bama completely dominated every phase of the game. Coach Grant Teaff must have been thinking he hoped he never saw crimson again.

TIMEOUT

In early June of 1980 my mother, who had been ill for several months, passed away. And the next day, a Saturday, I suffered a stroke which affected the right side of my body, primarily my mouth and arm. It was a fair-sized stroke and I was stretched out in Baptist Montclair Hospital wondering where my life went from there.

Pride, very wisely, put a large "no visitors" sign on my door and instructed the hospital to cut off the telephone. This suited me fine. I wanted to get back by myself to my old self with no one but my family. However, several days later Charley Thornton, a good friend and then assistant athletics director at The University, stuck his head in my door and came over to see me. Standing by me, Charley said "John, I know Coach has called several times about you and written you a note." I nodded, because I had gotten it; a handwritten note telling me to hang in there and recover.

"But," Charley continued, "he wanted me to come up and tell you that he knows you're going to get back on your feet and knows your voice will come back okay and he wants you to know that the play-by-play job is yours as long as you want it. If you can't get back by September 12, then we'll have Doug do it and let Tommy do the color. (Tommy Roberts, an outstanding young broadcast executive, had joined our team primarily to provide our network with up-to-date scores on virtually every game around the country.) But whenever you're back, and whenever you're ready, Coach wants you to know the job is yours."

Charley patted me on the shoulder as I nodded understanding at him with tears in my eyes. Charley went on. "I know you've got plenty to do to get back, but I wanted to see you and Coach wanted me to tell you that." It would be hard to exaggerate how much I appreciated Charley's visit and Coach's thoughts.

I did work very hard to come back. I was home one afternoon about the middle of August following the stroke when the telephone rang. The familiar voice asked, "Do you want some company?" It was Coach, and he and his driver, University Policeman Billy Varner, came out and paid me about an hour's visit. Naturally I tried to talk as plainly as I could, although I'm sure it wasn't very

good. Nevertheless, Coach said, "Hell, it sounds fine to me."

No one would ever have accused Coach Bryant of being an elocutionist, but if it sounded good to him, it certainly sounded good to me.

I did make it back for the opener that year, against Georgia Tech. And although perhaps I should not have, I did the play-by-play for that season. I'm sure Alabama listeners suffered even more than usual, but believe me, it was a happy thing for me to feel that I had climbed a mountain. I certainly had a lot of help from the people at Baptist Hospital and Lakeshore Hospital, particularly Mrs. Witherspoon at Baptist, Diane Jones at Lakeshore, and Dan Phillips, my speech therapist. Dan took a real interest in me. He called me after each game with some suggestions or criticisms. I think Dan is really the only one who knows how hard I had worked on the speech exercises he gave me. As a matter of fact, Dan is an Auburn grad . . . one for whom I'll holler "War Eagle" at the top of my lungs anytime.

1981

Alabama and LSU were picked to open the NCAA television season in 1981, a night game from Baton Rouge on September 5. Kenny Simon got things under way with a 51-yard scamper and the Tide went on to win, 24-7. Bama was among the favorites for the national championship that year and it looked like that result might well be in the cards. That changed the next week in Birmingham's Legion Field. Alabama was a prohibitive favorite against Georgia Tech, but the Yellow Jackets pulled off what must be one of the biggest upsets of recent college football days. And it wasn't a fluke.

Tech's senior quarterback, Mike Kelley, did a fine job and their young runner, Robert Lavette, had a great afternoon. The most significant thing was that Tech scored 10 points in the final quarter to beat Alabama 24-21. There was a pass play that was critical in this game. An Alabama receiver appeared to have been interfered with by a Tech defensive back, but the official who would have made that call had slipped down. No one else threw a flag, so instead of having a first down and good field position, Alabama had to kick. I try not to criticize officiating, and do not in this case, because regardless of a single call in a game in which Alabama was the prohibitive favorite it was, it should not have made any difference. Not only did the fourth quarter not belong to Alabama for the first time in many, many games, the Tide didn't even come close to sharing it. This was the first of several games over a several years span in which the Tide—formerly a great fourth quarter team—couldn't handle the drama of the final stanza. It was a tremendous victory for Georgia Tech, the only win the Engineers would post that year, and it was the first chink that might indicate dominance of Bryant teams in the Southeastern Conference was beginning to wane.

The next Saturday in Commonwealth Stadium in Lexington, Kentucky, the Tide again caught a Tartar in the Wildcats, who

played like men possessed. Alabama was able to pull the game out on the strength of four field goals by Peter Kim. The big play of the game was little Ken Coley clawing, scratching, spinning and finally getting a first down at a time when Alabama desperately needed one. Coley's cause was aided in no small part by his tearaway jersey, the last year that apparel was legal. Bama went ahead on that drive, 12-10, then got a very late touchdown following a Kentucky turnover. The game was a heck of a lot closer than the final score of 19-10 would indicate.

Vanderbilt and Ole Miss fell to the Tide before Bama tangled with Southern Mississippi before a full house at Birmingham's Legion Field. Reggie Collier and Sammy Winder always put on their best game face against Alabama, and this was sure no exception. Collier, the tall, rangy quarterback who was most dangerous when running with the football, played a great game and the teams were tied, 3-3, at halftime. Alabama came back with a touchdown in the third quarter to lead, 10-3, but once again Alabama could not handle fourth quarter heroics. The Southerners got a big break when a confused Alabama defense called a time out that enabled the Golden Eagles to get their placekicker in without the pressure of time running out. He kicked it through to earn Southern Miss a 13-13 tie. In the fourth quarter Southern Miss got 10 points, Alabama three.

The next week it was Tennessee in Birmingham, and although Tennessee won the last quarter, 12-0, Alabama was ahead at the half, 28-0, and closed with a 38-19 win over the Vols. It was Alabama's 11th straight victory in this storied Southern series.

Rutgers was the homecoming opponent the next week, and Alabama proved much more capable of sharp activity against the Scarlet Knights on Bama turf. The Knights must have missed the more salubrious confines of the Meadowlands: Alabama 31, Rutgers 7.

Despite Alabama's overwhelming dominance of Mississippi State, few games with the Bulldogs have been short on hard hitting. The 1981 game was no exception. Alabama was able to regain its winning ways against the Bulldogs, but it wasn't that easy. Little Peter Kim had a field goal blocked, one of State's big linemen picking it up and running down the field. Peter, attempting to make the tackle, was unhinged from his equanimity and also hurt a leg. The game was tied 10-10 in the final quarter when a 28-yard field goal situation came up. Terry Sanders, a young freshman from Bir-

mingham, coolly booted it through to give Alabama a 13-10 victory.

Throughout the season there had been a countdown. Coach Bryant was going for the record of all-time college coaching victories. He had entered the season with 306 wins (against only 79 losses and 16 ties). Amos Alonzo Stagg had held the record of 314 for decades. Now Coach was at 313 and Bama was headed to University Park, Pennsylvania, to take on the Lions of Penn State. Of course the game was on national television, but it was still a packed house of 85,000 in Beaver Stadium at University Park. It was Alabama's first trip to University Park and, among other things, we learned you can't hardly get there from here.

We went to New York and drove out the Pennsylvania Turnpike, finally getting to where the Alabama team was staying, about 30 miles from University Park. As we drove over the next morning with all of the red and blue bedecked cars we decided we had time for a short detour. We took a back route through a couple of little Pennsylvania towns, including some inhabited by the Amish. We passed any number of black-clad Amish in horsedrawn buckboards. It was really a throwback in history.

Finally we reached Penn State, which is a gigantic university. In fact, that's about all there is to University Park.

The 1981 Alabama team, whose past counterparts had had a couple of great Sugar Bowl victories over the Lions, rose to new heights that afternoon, playing by far the best game of the year by the Tide. There is no question that this team, playing with the additional pressure of "The Record," was determined to put that win on the board. Walter Lewis had an absolutely fantastic afternoon, playing with the recklessness that is needed for greatness. The Alabama defense came through with another spectacular goalline series, keeping the blue-shirted Nittany's out of the end zone on six straight calls with a penalty sprinkled in. It was a real thrill to see Coach Bryant tip his hat to his defenders and shake the hands of as many as he could reach as the Tide stop troops stormed from the field in glee.

Alabama led 24-3 at the half and it was never close. The final score was 31-16 on Joe Paterno's home turf.

That set the stage for perhaps the biggest of the always big Alabama-Auburn games. It, too, was nationally-telecast as the country watched Coach Bryant go for the record. With all the attendant

hoopla and publicity it's a wonder that the Alabama boys were able to breathe, much less play. Auburn had a fine football team. It was the Tigers' home game and Auburn had billed the game as "Coach Bryant's first try to break the record." Auburn, dressed in blue jerseys, was fired up under Coach Pat Dye. I have no doubts that Auburn was just as determined to keep Alabama from getting Coach Bryant's 315th against them as the Alabama boys were determined to get it against the Tigers that day.

It was a tremendous contest, all that college football should be. It was tied at the half 7-7 and it was tied at the end of the third quarter 14-14. Auburn took the lead on a field goal early in the fourth quarter. But Alabama, like the Tide in days gone by, made the fourth quarter absolutely belong to them and belong to their beloved coach. Walter Lewis put Alabama ahead with a 38-yard pass to Jesse Bendross. Then very late in the game the Tide got two spectacular runs from Linnie Patrick, one to get the ball close to the Auburn goalline, the other to put it in and give Alabama its 28-17 victory and Coach Bryant his 315th victory. . . the final bauble in football's most glittering diadem.

The bowl game, after all that, had to be anticlimatic, and since it was against our old nemesis, the Texas Longhorns, it was inevitable. Alabama went into the game missing one linebacker to a discipline problem, then lost another early in the game with a broken hand. We did a creditable job, leading into the last quarter, but a quarterback draw right up the middle of the Alabama defense gave Texas its winning points. It seemed as though Alabama might pull it out late, but. . .

Who am I kidding? How the hell do we beat Texas?

THE LAST YEAR

All of us had real high hopes for 1982 and the opener against Georgia Tech in Atlanta did nothing to dispel these feelings. The Yellow Jackets were definitely improved, but they had upset the Tide the year before in Birmingham and the Big Red made them pay the price at Grant Field, 45-7.

The next week marked the final confrontation between Paul Bryant and Steve Sloan. The game was in Jackson and Mississippi Governor William Winter, one of the finest gentlemen ever in politics and a true-blue (red and blue?) Ole Miss fan, had a coffee at the mansion the morning of the game in honor of the College Football Hall of Fame. I had known Bill Winter for a long time and he was kind enough to invite me. As we chatted of the day's upcoming game, his face fell when I told him I thought the 1982 team might be one of Alabama's best ever. That afternoon at Mississippi Memorial Stadium the Tide made me look good, trouncing the Rebels 42-14.

Then things began to change. Vanderbilt came to Tuscaloosa the next weekend and, except for misplaying an Alabama kickoff around their goalline, the Commodores might well have beaten Bama that afternoon. Whit Taylor, the exceptional Vanderbilt quarterback, sustained an injury late in the second quarter and could not play again that day. Their second stringer, Kurt Page, came in and dealt the Tide fits, throwing for two touchdowns and driving the Commodores deep into Bama territory late in the game. Alabama finally prevailed, 24-21, thanks to Peter Kim's toe. (This may have been the game where, in my concern for the Tide cause, I referred to "the strong right arm of Peter Kim," and Layton corrected me, saying "his right leg was important, too.")

So Vanderbilt was a "cloud no bigger than a man's hand," but it presaged somehow the sadness that would be the 1982 season. The game began a pattern of poor and inconsistent second half play,

a pattern that would last throughout the year.

Alabama did win a big one the next week, a nationally-televised game against Penn State. The Tide did its offensive business in the first half and got a couple of big plays in the second half to hold off the Nittany Lions. At that point I considered Penn State a team that Bama held a jinx over, sort of like those the guys from South Bend and Austin have on us. (The Tide baseball season was the best ever in 1983, but Bama was NCAA runnerup to—who else?—Texas. In football, we're 0-6-1 against the Longhorns. I told somebody that I'm beginning to believe Texas would beat us at tiddley winks even if we had all the tiddleys.)

All during the second half the Penn State boys were playing with great fire and zeal. One sensed they *knew* they were going to come back and win. But with Alabama nursing a 27-21 lead, Tide defensive end Russ Wood came up with a great shoestring tackle on Curt Warner to throw State's fine back for a loss on a key third down play. On the ensuing punt, the Penn State fullback backed up into the kick and Alabama got the ball deep in Penn State territory. It was a fantastic break for Bama and a stunning blow to the Penn State cause. In 50 years of watching football, that is the only time I have ever seen that happen. The Tide took it in for an insurance touchdown, then wrapped it up when Eddie Lowe intercepted a pass and returned it 30 yards for another score. The final margin was 42-21 and the victory propelled Alabama to the top of the polls. At the time no one would have guessed that Penn State would go on to win the national championship, despite the worst loss any number one team had ever suffered.

The win was the good news. The bad news came in Knoxville the next week. Again, the first half was Bama's despite great plays by Tennessee's speedster corps, but Alabama opened the second half giving up a fumble. Within five minutes the Vols had scored 11 points to our none. While Penn State had become deflated in the late going against Alabama, one could sense Tennessee getting stronger with each tick of the clock. Our defense played miserably and a youthful Vol tailback got the idea he was Herschel Walker, gaining over 100 yards that day.

After a decade-long drought, the Vols won 35-28, producing post game pandemonium and chaos like I have never seen in a stadium. There is some understanding for it. Had the situation been re-

versed, Alabama faithful may have reacted in the same way. But I hope now we all have it out of our systems and can be calmer about such events. It's just too damn dangerous for crowds to topple goal-posts and then rampage with the pieces of it.

Walking back to the Mooney boat through the wildly cheering Vol fans and the frenzy of World's Fair goers, band music, and whirring giant Ferris wheels, I couldn't shake a feeling of despondency. Not for the single loss, Heaven knows, but the awareness that Tennessee fans, too, sensed in their win the end of an era, Paul Bryant's era. The yoke of his dominance over their team had been thrown off and they were deliriously happy about it. And I knew it was true, too, because clocks and calendars yield to no man, not even one with the iron will, enormous strength and fearsome determination of Paul Bryant.

We made it outside the stadium after what I hoped was a "cooling off" period. A tall, distinguished-looking gentleman in gray suit and brilliant orange vest was standing at the top of the steps by the stadium. He held his arms aloft and shouted fervently, "Savor it! It's been twelve long years! I say savor it, friends, savor it!"

Doug was doing the Tuesday night "Bearline" radio program with Coach Bryant, which lasted for an hour and got calls from all over the South. John Ed Willoughby, a co-star on the popular "T.C.



Our broadcast crew at the end of my 30 years included (left to right) Jerry Duncan, Tom Roberts, Bert Bank, John Forney and Doug Layton.

and John Ed" morning radio show in Birmingham, and I drove to Tuscaloosa with Doug several times that fall and sat in Coach's office listening to the show. Though we never said it, I think we all had begun to feel that this might be the last roundup and wanted to be a part of the legend a little longer.

Coach was easy going and affable and seemed genuinely to enjoy the show, the occasional nut calls and all. But I definitely sensed a frustration in him that the season had begun to go sour.

People needled me after the Tennessee game, saying I was a Cassandra, poor-mouthing so about one game. My feeling was (and is now) that there were symptoms of a deeper malady. Even playing extremely poorly (and almost all teams have an occasional bad day), the Tides of old would not have lost to Georgia Tech in 1981 or Tennessee in 1982. I felt that Coach Bryant wanted so much to infuse his team with the old fire and zeal, to transmit once again his own strength of will-to-win to his players. But he was sicker and weaker than any of us knew, and even his incredible constitution could not do as he wished.

Before the call-in show prior to the LSU game he told us he thought his team would "do well, very, very well, indeed." I thought at the time with a sinking feeling that his words had the ring of someone walking past the graveyard whistling.

The Bayou Bengals buried the Tide that Saturday. The score was 20-10, but it was the most decisive win for LSU in the entire Alabama-LSU series. It was one of a handful of games Alabama teams under Coach Bryant played in which the Tide was physically manhandled. Dardar, Melancon, Elko and company held Bama to six first downs.

This was followed by the devastating loss to Southern Mississippi, when the Golden Eagles scored the first six times they had the ball. It was the second loss at Bryant-Denny Stadium in the 25 years.

The team regrouped awfully well considering everything and played a fine game against Auburn. Alabama had 507 yards of offense to 257 yards for Auburn, 27 to 11 in first downs. But the Tide made two errors and the Tigers cashed them both. Meanwhile, Pat Dye's warriors played errorless, patient football and won the finale, 23-22. In the course of the game Alabama marched from the Tide six to the Tigers' two-foot line and settled for a field goal. I was then

and remain aghast at that call. That made it three straight losses to end the regular season.

We had a reprise of the wild scene in Knoxville at Legion Field that day, and since it was Auburn's first victory in 10 years, again it was somewhat understandable. But just as had been the case in Knoxville, an Auburn student was hurt badly enough to go to the hospital. Maybe the answer is to furnish both sides with plywood goalposts for post game frenzies.

Several of us went to Coach's television taping the next morning. Despite a brave front, it was obvious he was totally exhausted and despondent. And though we may have hoped it would go on forever, his retirement announcement a week or so later really came as no surprise. For the winningest coach in college football history the road would end in Memphis, happily with one more victory.

The University of Alabama
Department of Athletics
University, Alabama 35886

Paul W. Bryant
Athletic Director &
Head Football Coach

National Football Champions
1961, 1964, 1965, 1973, 1978, and 1979

December 23, 1982

Mr. John M. Forney
120 Office Park Drive
Birmingham, AL 35223

Dear John,

We do indeed have some memories to share, John, and I am sure both us will recall them fondly.

Please allow me to thank you for your outstanding contributions to University of Alabama football. You have been magnificent. I trust you will continue to do your part for our tradition.

I sincerely appreciate what you said in your letter. And while I am sure I will miss football, I also think my decision to retire at this point is proper.

My best to you in the future.

Sincerely,


Paul Bryant

NOW FOR THE WRAP-UP...

Thirty years behind the Alabama Network microphone gave me some wonderful times and gave me acquaintance with fascinating people.

I owe a tremendous debt to many in the sports information office at The University, beginning with Finus Gaston and continuing through Jack Perry as sports information directors. They also had invaluable assistants and student assistants through the years, young men like Frank Rumore (whose father Joe was perhaps the number one radio personality in Alabama for years and who helped me in the business a long time ago), Mike Stewart, Larry White, J.D. Rutledge, Merrill Jones, C.K. Briner, Bruce Graham, Tom Ensey, Mike Bolton, Dennis Greenwood, Mark Womack, Sam Hughes, Chad Mize, Danny Riley, Jim Noel, Ben Cook, Ben Sims, Barry Huey, Rick Gilliam, Cecil Hurt, Chass Horton, Pete Derzis, Phillip Marshall, Rocky Van Hoose and Mark Harper. Many of them have stayed in the sports business.

And especially to Charley Thornton and Kirk McNair. Charley ran the sports information office for some 20 years, also serving as an assistant athletics director with many other duties under Coach Bryant. He is one of the most capable people in sports administration in the country and I am pleased to count him as a warm, personal friend. Kirk worked in the glory days of the seventies before striking out on his own as editor and publisher of **'BAMA** magazine. These are two of the brightest guys you'll ever meet, and I treasure the times spent with them very much. And also to their girl Friday, Vera Dowdle, who was much more than a secretary to Charley and Kirk.

There is no way anyone from outside the business could truly appreciate or realize all the things the members of a sports information office do. They nursemaid recalcitrant writers and broadcasters and cater to their sometimes unusual whims; even to

writing a story or column for a sports writer who may have fallen prey to a surfeit of malt, hops or the grape, or just plain ennui. They perform a lot of duties for the players and can really help boost low spirits many times with them. They are the sounding board for



My son the spotter. John III served in that important capacity for several years prior to his leaving for college.

everyone on the coaching and athletic staff. And, truly, there is no such thing as fixed "office hours."

The several years when Coach Bryant invited bowl reps to his press gatherings at Lake Martin allowed me to get acquainted with Field Scovell and Jim "Hoss" Brock of the Cotton Bowl; Aruns Callery, Mickey Holmes and others from the Sugar Bowl; Tim Treadwell of the Liberty Bowl; George Olsen and Nelson Briles from the Gator Bowl; Jack Baldwin, Bill Fields and Bill Ward from the Orange Bowl; and a lot of other nice and memorable folk.

On a very personal note, there were five seasons that were particularly pleasant ones for me when my son, John III, helped me in the booth spotting the opposing teams. John did this in the early seventies before he left to attend Dartmouth in 1976. Those were happy times for both of us, and I hope (and think) he'll remember them the rest of his life.

In our travels and at numerous functions we had close encounters with the fourth estate. I've enjoyed the Birmingham guys for years, going back to Henry Vance and up through Zipp Newman, Naylor Stone, Bob Phillips, Benny Marshall, Jerry Bryan, Alf Van Hoose, Clyde Bolton, Jimmy Bryan (and a wild careening ride in Knoxville one Friday night I was awfully glad to survive), Hoyt Harwell, Bill Lumpkin, Clettus Atkinson, Mack Shoemaker, Paul Finebaum, Cecil Murdock, Jim Martin, Wayne Martin, Frank McGowan and on down the line.

And across the state, Charles Land, George Smith, Wayne Hester, Jack Doane, Max Mosley, Sam Adams, Dennis Smitherman, Vincent Johnson, Pat Moulton, Ben Nolan, Al Browning, Mike McKenzie, Billy Mitchell, Norman Bassett, Jimmy Smothers, John Pruett, Al Burleson, Bill Easterling and Hap Holbrooks.

And from around the South, Walter Stewart, Dave Bloom, John Logue, George Lapidès, Jack Hairston, Tom McEwen, F.M. Williams, Tom Siler, Peter Finney, Jesse Outlar, Furman Bisher, Blackie Sherrod, Mickey Herskowitz, John Underwood, Clark Nealon, Wirt Gammon, Roy Exum, Ben Byrd, John Bibb, Jimmy Davy, Ed Shearer, David Moffit, Al Dunning, David Davidson, Harley Bowers, Bill Ross, Marty Mule, and certainly that great and courtly gentleman, Fred Russell, who never failed to laugh at my jokes.

In these three decades I got to know a lot of the men behind the

larynxes you listened to on Saturdays—John Ferguson and Walter Hill, Bill Goodrich and Stan Torgerson (who always knew the best restaurants for gourmets like him and me), Otis Boggs, Bill Monday, Al Wester, Larry Munson, Charley McAlexander and Paul Ells, Bob Fulton, George Mooney and Bobby Foxx (the great Tennessee tailback struck down tragically by a debilitating disease), John Ward, Thad Horton and Al Ciraldo, and the irrepressible Jack Cristil (whose angry and impassioned pleas for us when we were “bumped” from our booth in Jackson one night will always be appreciated). From the wonderful world of television land we have enjoyed Ron Grillo, Herb Winches, Jim Koblas and Tom York. And, of course, those from loyal opposition . . . Leland Childs, Buddy Rutledge, Bill Hickey, Dan Daniel, Gary Sanders, Phil Snow, Tom Hamlin, Paul Ellen and now Jim Fyffe. And a special nod to Buddy Davidson, David Housel and Mel Pulliam from the Auburn sports information office.

Although the sports information directors work for their own schools, that includes being most helpful to the opposing broadcast crew. Through the years we have fond memories of and grateful appreciation to those we dealt with regularly, including Bob Hartley and Bo Carter at Mississippi State, Haywood Harris and Bud Ford at Tennessee, Bud Johnson and Paul Manasseh at LSU, Lew Harris, Bill Stewart and Ron Barnes at Vanderbilt, Norm Carlson at Auburn and Florida, Billy Gates, Bobo Champion and Ralph Carpenter at Ole Miss, Ned West at Georgia Tech, Dan Magill at Georgia, Russell Rice at Kentucky, George Gallett at Miami, Bob Bradley at Clemson and Ace Cleveland at Southern Miss.

We’re privileged to have the Southeastern Conference headquarters in Birmingham. Their head men—Bernie Moore, Tonto Coleman and Dr. Boyd McWhorter—are class people if there ever were. Our thanks, too, to those who have been involved in running the office over the years, men like Cliff Harper, Hootie Ingram, Gordon Pettus, Bob Barrett, the indefatigable Elmore “Scoop” Hudgins, Jim McCullough, Mark Womack, Steve Townsend, John Guthrie, P.J. Ellis, and the loyal, hard-working ladies who surround them.

I’ve certainly been privileged to work with many outstanding individuals in University administration . . . Frank Rose, David Mathews and Joab Thomas in the prexy’s chair; A.B. Moore,

Luther Callahan, Willard Gray, Charley Scott, Jeff Coleman and Richard Thigpen. And on the Bryant staff, loyal, hard-working assistants such as Sam Bailey, Don McDaniel, Jim Goostree, Clem Gryska, Jack Rutledge, Mal Moore, Brother Oliver, Jimmy Sharpe, Dude Hennessey, Paul Crane, Steve Sloan, Howard Schnellenberger, Bebes Stallings, John David Crow, Pat James, Sang Lyda, B.W. Whittington, C.D. Tatum, Hayden Riley, Davis Culp, Grover Niles, Willie Meadows, Gary White, Dee Powell, Shorty White, Charley Bradshaw, Ken Meyer, Bud Moore, Richard Williamson, Louis Campbell, Sylvester Croom, Bobby Marks, and Carney Laslie. Also a part of the traveling party for so many years were Major Joe Smelley, Captain Red Nichols and Captain Robert Miller of the Alabama Highway Patrol and Billy Varner of University Police.

I've mentioned some of the players who made those 30 years so memorable, but my thanks goes to the hundreds of others who gave their all for the Crimson and White.

A special thanks, of course, to a lot of people who were part of the Alabama Football Network . . . Doug Layton, Jerry Duncan, Stan Siegal (whose brother, Don, is a prominent Birmingham lawyer now and who was an excellent spotter and statistics man), Tom Roberts, Dr. Gary Ray (who helped me so much in my first year), another spotter par excellence Jimmy Bank, and his dad, Bert, who so assiduously made certain we did not ignore "station breaks." To our engineer, Jimmy Jones and his assistants. And also to the intrepid "taper," C.K. Briner.

Naturally to my two "employers" over those 30 years, Jerry Johnston and R.T. Frick, two fine gentlemen who have paid a lot of money to Alabama and other prominent Southern universities in their capacity as packagers of radio networks and owners of the popular "Pick of Dixie" games.

And certainly to those loyal Alabama fans who followed their beloved Crimson Tide through our broadcasts.

I'm sure I've omitted some, so please forgive me if I left you out. You have all contributed to some great autumns in my life.

SIGN OFF

This book has been thought about for years, but nothing was put down on paper until Coach Bryant announced his retirement in December, 1982. I began to make a few notes going back over press brochures from earlier years, wishing I had kept some sort of diary. But, surprisingly, memories' mists parted much more than I could have hoped for. Maybe it was my association with the Coach—a man possessed of the most total, encyclopedic recall I have ever encountered. Whatever it was, I was able to get down on paper most of the things I would have wanted to. (There are a couple of things remembered but omitted, because I wasn't sure changing the names could sufficiently protect the innocent.)

Maybe I'd finished a fourth of it before that heart-stabbing afternoon in late January when a friend called to tell me he had heard from a Druid City Hospital employee that Coach had died. Shortly afterwards the radio confirmed the awful news.

I decided not to change anything, just to try to finish it pretty much the way I had planned. I didn't know then the full extent of the valedictory it was to be.

So I went to Tuscaloosa and stayed at the Bryant house for awhile and saw and visited with the luminaries of the sports world who had come to bid farewell to one of the brightest stars in its constellation.

And the next day I walked a mile or so to be near the gravesite. I waited on a little knoll with Jimmy McDowell of the College Football Foundation and Hall of Fame and Mickey Herskowitz of the Houston Post who had flown in with a man who had played for Coach Bryant at Texas A&M. This big, rugged former Aggie brought his 13-year-old son to the funeral.

Before long we could see the bright lights of the police escort flashing distantly through Elmwood, and soon the tremendous cortege pulled in front of us. We walked forward to get a bit closer, and I noticed that Grafton Hocutt from the funeral home in Tuscaloosa had driven the hearse himself. A 60-year Alabama fan, Grafton has watched several thousand Alabama practices, many of them from just below the Coach's tower. I deduced that Grafton

would have considered letting no one else bring Paul Bryant to his final rest.

I felt a strong hand on my arm and turned to see Sergeant Bobby Hayes, the Birmingham Police Department Traffic Control director, looking at me through dark glasses. "You need to be closer, John," he said, and steered me part way up the little slope to be near the grave.

Bobby, too, had performed countless tasks for Alabama and Coach Bryant, escorting the Tide through Birmingham for Legion Field games, meeting opponents' planes, getting coaches and bowl representatives and assorted press and broadcast types through heavy game traffic for close deadlines, and handling dozens of other such problems. Bobby was not far from retirement, but no one else was going to be in charge that day.

The ministers were properly brief. As I looked at the casket and the youthful player pallbearers, I thought sadly that his strength and power and force were now still. And I hoped there would be others possessing these qualities when the country needed them. He was a hell of a man.

The service was over, and I walked with the crowd out through the iron gates of Elmwood. It was journey's end.

"All the college boys were going to the service in 1943," John Forney says. "Mr. Doss (owner of the station WJRD) called Tuscaloosa High and said send me somebody who won't get drafted for at least a year." At the age of 15 Forney won a competitive audition for his first announcing job.

He worked as staff and sports announcer for WJRD and later WTBC in Tuscaloosa. At WAPI Birmingham after college he did football, basketball and baseball play-by-play before moving to New York and getting into the advertising business.

After returning to Alabama in 1952 he handled some spot radio assignments and also wrote a sports column for the SUN PAPERS for seven years. In 1980 he published a book of short stories entitled CRIMSON MEMORIES, GOLDEN DAYS.

His 30 year relationship with the Alabama Football Network began in 1953.

Thirty years behind the Alabama microphone



John Forney is a native Alabamian whose roots go deep in the state. His great-grandfather, John Horace Forney, was a West Point graduate who became a Confederate general and served with distinction at the battle of Vicksburg. His wife, Septima, was the granddaughter of Edward Rutledge, a signer of the Declaration of Independence from South Carolina.

Forney's paternal grandfather founded the School of Pedagogy at the University of Alabama, the forerunner of that institution's School of Education.

His maternal grandfather, Manly

Foster, was a prominent lawyer and legislator from Tuscaloosa County. His mother's brother, Dr. Richard C. Foster, was president of the University from 1936 until his untimely death in 1941. His father, Dr. J.M. Forney, was a well-known physician and surgeon who practiced in Tuscaloosa and New York. During World War II Dr. Forney headed a combat surgical team involved in ten invasions in the Pacific Theatre.

Forney, the father of five children, lives in Birmingham where he has been a member of Alabama's largest advertising agency, Luckie & Forney, for over 30 years.